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# An Unmarried Father

BOOKS BY FLOYD DELL

*Novels*

AN UNMARRIED FATHER  
AN OLD MAN'S FOLLY  
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KING ARTHUR'S SOCKS, AND  
OTHER VILLAGE PLAYS

# AN UNMARRIED FATHER

*A Novel*

By  
Floyd Dell



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AN UNMARRIED FATHER  
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BOOK ONE  
The Discovery



# AN UNMARRIED FATHER

## CHAPTER I: The Letter

THAT April morning Norman Overbeck drove his father to the station and put him on the early train for Springfield. The elder Overbeck—J. J. Overbeck—was going to argue a case before the supreme court. Norman, his unworthy son, as he felt himself to be, drove on to the office. Parking his car in front of the Overbeck building until he should want it again that afternoon, according to the leisurely custom of Vickley on the Mississippi, he went up the dingy, old-fashioned stairway to the Overbeck and Overbeck offices. In the hall he glanced up for a moment at the new sign with the name repeated, replacing the old one of "J. J. Overbeck, Attorney-at-Law." It was less than a year since Norman had been admitted to the bar and been made a member of the law-firm. When his father wasn't with him he sometimes glanced up at that sign, expecting to find in it some reassurance, something that would make him feel in himself the dignity and power which were associated with his father's name. He never quite got it. Most of the

time it seemed to him that all he had so far done was to make costly mistakes.

"Good morning, Miss Patterson," he said to the stenographer. "Is my mail ready?"

"Yes, sir," said the girl. "It's on your desk."

She looked at him, when he turned away, with admiration: for he was tall, handsome enough with his thoughtful brown eyes and light wavy hair—and he was the son of J. J. Overbeck.

He did not go to his own office immediately. He lingered in the outer office, staring at the rows of law-reports, bound in musty calf and newer buckram. He was pursuing a line of private psychological inquiry, not easily to be conducted when his father was there. His father would have asked, "What are you looking for?" and he would have had to give some sensible answer. . . . Perhaps it wasn't the books, they were only law-books. He looked at the old leather-upholstered mahogany furniture. . . . He was trying to confront something about this office which obscurely intimidated him, made him feel foolishly young and out of place. It was absurd to feel that way, when he had won his first important case yesterday. . . . He turned to his office.

As he passed Miss Patterson, he reflected that she obviously thought of him as grown up. . . .

He was sitting at his desk a minute or two later when the telephone rang. He lifted the receiver. "Yes?" he said. It was Miss Patterson.



"Your sister just called up," she said. (Doris? he thought.) "She didn't want to disturb you and asked me to give you the message."

No, that wouldn't be his kid sister Doris. She wouldn't care whether she disturbed him or not. That was Lucinda. He frowned slightly, as the picture of that futile, pathetic, rather old-maidish sister came before him.

"All right, what is it?" he asked patiently.

"She wanted me to remind you that you promised to go and look at a dog for her. Out at Schwartz's. It's a Scotch terrier puppy. The one she is thinking of taking has a black spot over the left eye. She thought you might have forgotten."

It was true, he had forgotten, though she had spoken of it last night and again at breakfast this morning.

"Thank you, Miss Patterson. If my sister should call up again, tell her I said I wouldn't forget about it."

Why did he have to go and look at that dog? But that was just like Lucinda. . . . If Doris had wanted a dog, she'd have gone and bought it, without asking any advice.

Whenever he thought of Lucinda, he consoled himself by thinking of Doris. An historical epoch seemed to have intervened between them. It was strange to think of them as being sisters. Families were queer things. Lucinda at thirty-five belonged to a decaying world; Doris at sixteen to another, a

feverish and jazzy, but certainly a healthier one. . . . But families are not always pleasant things to think about.

His mind went back to its interrupted thoughts about himself.

—Yes, he reflected, he was grown up in everybody else's eyes. Why not, then, in his own? He was twenty-five years old, and engaged to be married. He and Madge were going to be married in June. He had won that Harrington case. His future was secure. Why should he feel as though he were merely pretending to be what he was—and as though the pretense were likely to be found out at any moment, and he himself swept out into chaos like a scrap of paper in a high wind? What was he afraid of? There was nothing to be afraid of. He could cope with any situation that would arise. He was building himself securely into the solid structure of—of Vickley. He would be what his father had been. There was no doubt of it.

He turned to his mail. He sorted it through rapidly, and finding nothing outwardly attractive and unbusiness-like to distract him, he opened the letters in turn. His day's work had begun.

The first two letters he made notations upon and put aside.

The third letter puzzled him.

It was from a Martha Zerneke, in Chicago—a person quite unknown to him, but, according to a small printed inscription in one corner of her letter-

head, "Medical Director, St. Thecla Child Adoption Society." The letter began pleasantly by hoping that he was coming, or could arrange to come to Chicago to attend the Springer exhibit at the Steinbach Galleries, April 4th to 18th, and preferably during the following week, when—as the letter went on strangely to say—she would like to have him call at her office concerning a matter of personal interest to him which it would not be so convenient to take up in correspondence. "Very truly yours."

After reading it, at first idly and then very carefully, he laid it aside as incomprehensible, and went on with his other mail. But having glanced at several letters, he took it up again, sat back in his chair, lighted a cigarette, and considered it thoughtfully.

The reference to the Springer exhibit suggested that the letter was based upon some knowledge of his habits, for he made a point of running up to Chicago to see the most interesting of the picture shows; he had, in fact, planned to go to see this one, for he had been interested in Springer ever since he had seen him and his pictures back in Boston a year ago. So far the suggestion was of art matters. But the rest of the letter didn't go to that tune. Indeed, the casual familiarity of the opening appeared to be a diplomatic disguise—as if for the benefit of any one else who might happen to open his mail in his absence! "A matter of personal interest to you which it would not be so convenient to take up in correspondence." There was a veiled

threat in that. . . . What sort of matter was there that could not "conveniently" be taken up in correspondence? A matter of personal interest to him! And this from a doctor—a woman doctor. The Medical Director of a Child Adoption Society. Why, it was preposterous! Absurd!

Perhaps he was reading into it some meaning that wasn't there. He studied it carefully, and shook his head. If not that, what could it mean?

His acquaintance with girls in Chicago was of the most casual sort. There was no one— He had an impulse to throw the thing into the waste basket. . . . But if he ignored it, and this Dr. Zerneke did take up the matter in correspondence, it might become embarrassing. There was certainly some mistake; but that would be no protection if the thing—whatever it was—got into the newspapers. After all, appearances were against him. He had made trips to Chicago from time to time, and people would quite readily believe that it hadn't all been for the sake of art. It would be a difficult position for the most innocent of men. And there was Madge to be considered. She might think there was something to it, and break off the engagement! And his father—oh, his father would believe him; but he would think he had made a fool of himself in some way, and that it was his fault that such a thing should ever have come up. Nobody had ever written a letter like that to J. J. Overbeck! . . . Doubtless because he attended strictly to the

law, and did not waste his time prowling about art-galleries and studios. Perhaps it *was* his own fault. Perhaps his father's way of life was the only correct one, if he were to build himself into the solid structure of Vickley. . . .

It occurred to him that this was the sort of thing he had been awaiting, without knowing what it was—some accident that would crash down his life about him, and whirl him out like a scrap of paper on the wind. . . . Well, not so bad as all that! He was taking this much too seriously. But it did need thinking about.

Under these circumstances—he smiled to himself—the proper thing to do was to consult a lawyer. . . . His father, of course, was the obvious person to consult, but he dismissed that idea instantly. Nor would he be likely to take up a thing like this with Medway, the chief clerk of Overbeck and Overbeck. Nor with any other lawyer in Vickley . . . except, perhaps, old Gilbert. . . .

He considered a moment longer, and then abruptly put out his cigarette and took up the telephone.



## CHAPTER II: Legal Advice

GILBERT RAND—old Gilbert—was sitting, large and ruddy and cheerful, at a table in the corner of Henschel's when Norman came in at twelve-thirty.

There are various ways in which an elderly lawyer of repute may show consideration for a young and untried one, if he is so disposed. Old Gilbert had been so disposed on various occasions during the past year, for he liked the boy. He didn't know what Norman wanted of him now except that it was something legal and personal, which nevertheless could be disposed of at lunch. Norman had suggested a quiet place where they could talk without interruption, and Gilbert had said that Henschel's would do.

He congratulated Norman on his victory in the Harrington case yesterday, to which Norman replied in a preoccupied way.

"Now," he said to Norman, when the luncheon was under way, "what's on your mind?"

Norman took the letter from his pocket and handed it over. "What do you think of this?" he said.

Gilbert put on his glasses and read the letter; then he read it again.

"A very clever piece of writing," he said thought-

fully; "evidently intended to look as little like blackmail as possible."

Blackmail!

"So you think so, too!" said Norman. "Well, what do you think I ought to do about it? Ignore it? or—what?"

"That depends," said Gilbert gravely. "If I'm to advise you, I'll have to know something about the situation. Who the girl is—her circumstances and character: you'd better tell me the whole story. Then we'll know where we're at."

Norman was rather taken aback. But he saw the humor of it, and smiled. "Aren't you taking a good deal for granted?" he said.

Old Gilbert smiled back at him. "Oh," he said, "the alibi part comes later. I realize, of course, that you are not necessarily the responsible party in this matter. Girls are sometimes unscrupulous about that sort of thing. The man who is in a position to pay gets saddled with the responsibility every time. You remember that case here in Vickley last winter, in Magistrate Cooley's court—I saw you there, I remember."

"Look here," said Norman. "You seem to accept it as a matter of fact—that I'm involved with some girl!"

Gilbert glanced at the letter. "I thought," he said, "that was what the letter was about. If I'm on the wrong track, you'll have to set me right. What is it about?"

"I don't know," said Norman. "But when I read it, I thought the same thing you did. It seemed like a veiled threat of blackmail. That's what puzzles me. You see, I've never heard of this Dr. Zerneke—and as for the girl, if that's what it hints at, as you also seem to think, I don't know who she's supposed to be. The whole thing comes out of a clear sky. I haven't the least idea what it's all about."

"That's curious," said Gilbert. "Let's have another look at it." He took it up, readjusting his glasses. "There *is* something queer about this letter," he said.

"Damned queer!" said Norman.

"I mean," said Gilbert, "that it has an air of—well, of quiet certainty."

"I don't know what you mean," said Norman, uncomfortably. Did old Gilbert think he was lying?

"To begin with, you are known by the writer to be interested in art. That in itself is nothing much. But the fact is put forward in a rather suggestive way. The reference to the Springer exhibit and the Steinbach galleries looks as though it were intended to remind you of something. . . . Does it suggest anything to you—a girl you met at the Steinbach galleries, for example?"

"I have not been in the habit of meeting girls at the Steinbach galleries—or any other galleries," said Norman, a little on his dignity. "I know prac-

tically no girls in Chicago—and I certainly have made love to none of them.”

“Well,” said old Gilbert, “there are hysterical girls who make strange accusations, upon slight or no provocation.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” said Norman. “It must be something like that.”

“There’s some explanation for this letter,” said Gilbert. “Let’s see what we can make out of it. A girl in Chicago . . . no, not necessarily in Chicago; she may have come there from somewhere. She goes to a doctor; we know nothing about this doctor, but presumably she knows her business. So we have to assume for the moment that the girl is actually in trouble. The doctor, apparently, is sympathetic. Money is evidently needed. The doctor undertakes to write to you.”

“Yes—but why to me?”

“Come, Norman; you are twenty-five years old, and so far as I know you have never taken any vows. How can you be sure that there’s no girl in the whole United States who couldn’t accuse you of having got her into this scrape?”

Norman flushed. “I don’t want to pretend that I’m a saint,” he said. “But I’m not a cad, either; I’ve been engaged to Madge for six months, and I swear I haven’t looked at another girl in that time. . . . In fact,” he added, “you’ll see how absurd it is to think that I could be mixed up in such a thing,

when I tell you that there's been nothing of that sort in my life since I left Cambridge. There was a waitress there—but that was fully four years ago."

"Well, Norman, you ought to know. But the trouble with this matter is that it is so vague. If it mentioned a name, you would know where you are at. As it is, of course, you may have overlooked some trifling incident of no consequence to you at the time."

Norman laughed. "I'm not such a devil of a fellow as all that. I'd not be likely to forget such an incident."

"I hope you're right. It might prove rather embarrassing to you if you went to this doctor in Chicago, indignantly convinced of your innocence, and then found you had made a little slip of memory."

"You think, then, that I ought to go and see this doctor?" Norman asked in surprise.

"Somebody ought to go, and find out what it's all about. There's something that needs to be straightened out. . . . Mistaken identity, possibly."

"Yes—there's that," said Norman. "There may be some very simple explanation."

"In any case," said Gilbert, "I don't think it's ordinary blackmail. A doctor, and especially one connected with a child adoption society, would hardly mix herself up with anything like that. And the whole tone of her letter shows a due consideration for your position. It's written in such a way as not to make trouble for you if it fell into the wrong



hands. And at the same time—or so it seems to me, though I've apparently stumbled into a mare's nest—it attempts to remind you who the girl is. . . . That reference to the Steinbach Galleries—”

“I said I knew no girls in Chicago,” Norman interrupted.

“You might take a wider range,” suggested Gilbert.

Norman made an impatient movement.

“I'm only trying to help you,” said Gilbert.

“I know, and at my own request,” said Norman.

“But I thought we had cleared up the possibility of it's being me who is involved.”

“I suppose we have,” said Gilbert. “Well, I was going to propose this to you. I'm going to Chicago to-night, to see some people in connection with the Ostrander case; and I'll go and see this doctor tomorrow if you like. I'll be home Sunday, and your mind will be set at rest without undue delay.”

“That's damned good of you, Gilbert.”

“Oh, it's nothing. . . . Only you see, if I'm to act for you, I'd like to be quite sure of my facts.”

“You can be quite sure the facts are as I've stated them,” said Norman comfortably.

“Then I'll take this letter with me,” said Gilbert. He folded it up and put it in his pocket. “However, there's one more angle on this thing still to be checked up on.”

“What angle is that?” asked Norman.

“The Cambridge angle,” said Gilbert. “Nothing

like being prepared for the worst, you know."

"But that," said Norman, "is all ancient history now."

"Just the same, I'd better know something about it. When did these Cambridge incidents occur and what was the nature of them?"

"Well, besides the waitress, there was just one incident, really," said Norman. "It was just before I came home. . . . It seems ages ago."

"Actually, however," said Gilbert, "it's been something less than a year. Late June to early April—"

"Ten—" said Norman, and then stopped, with a shock of dismay.

"Ten months," said Gilbert, "or to be exact, nine months and some days." He looked at the young man questioningly. "Does that letter begin to mean anything to you now?"

"It couldn't be Isabel," said Norman wonderingly. "And yet—"

"Isabel?" said Gilbert inquiringly—suppressing a smile.

Norman spoke with an effort. "Springer's pictures. . . . It was with her that I first saw them. At his studio in Boston. She took me there."

Gilbert nodded. "And now," he said, "this Isabel seems to be in Chicago, under the care of a doctor. It looks suspicious, doesn't it?"

"Oh, but that—it's impossible!" said Norman.

"For a girl to have an unexpected baby? I'm

afraid not," said Gilbert dryly. "Though this is rather late in the day for her to let you know about it."

"My God!" said Norman.

The waiter appeared, and recommended the Mocha tarte.

"I don't think I want anything more," said Norman faintly.

"You'd better have some coffee. No? Then nothing for me either. Bring the check."

When the waiter was gone, he said: "There's no occasion to look so upset. Girls have had by-blown babies before. And respectable Vickley citizens have been the fathers of them."

Then he added, more kindly: "We'll go to my office, thresh the whole thing out, and decide what's to be done."

### CHAPTER III: The Way of the World

GILBERT RAND, in his office, considered the boy sympathetically. "How do you feel now?" he asked.

"Still in a sort of a daze," Norman confessed.

Gilbert took from his desk drawer a bottle and glasses. "A little shot of this will help steady your nerves." He poured and they drank.

"You realize," said Gilbert, "that all this is merely a guess; there may be nothing to it whatever."

Norman shook his head. "It's only too damned true," he said. "I'm not going to try to fool myself about that."

"At any rate, we have to face it as a possible truth just now," said Gilbert, "and think of ways and means to handle it. And if I seemed to take it lightly, it isn't that I don't understand the seriousness of the situation for you. You have a career ahead of you; you're your father's son; and you're going to be married. This thing will have to be fixed up very quietly. But that's not so difficult as you might think. I want you to know that I'm with you in this, and I'll see you through it."

"It's awfully good of you," said Norman. "But what is there to do? You must forgive me if I seem

stupid. I feel as though the roof of the world had fallen in."

"The first thing we have to do is to go over the facts of the case. With them in my mind, I will be able to deal with the situation, whatever it is, in Chicago. And I'll be back here day after to-morrow—probably with everything all straightened out. All you have to do in the meantime is to keep smiling, and behave as if nothing had happened. . . . Now what's the matter?"

"I just remembered," said Norman, "that I've got to see Madge to-night."

"Yes, that may be a little difficult," said Gilbert.

"I'm sorry to be such a fool," said Norman. "But I don't see how I can face her."

"Now don't lose your nerve, my boy," said old Gilbert kindly. "Just sit tight and keep mum—that's all you have to do."

"That's just the trouble," said Norman.

"I know how you feel," said Gilbert. "But you won't come wearing your secret on your face. You can easily invent some discouragement in your law practice to account for your jumpiness. Besides, it's getting very near the time of your wedding; she'll have her mind on a thousand other things besides your state of nerves. Women aren't such good thought-readers as you might imagine." Then, when Norman remained silent, he said sharply: "You wouldn't be such an idiot as to tell her?"

"I was thinking that I ought to," said Norman.

"She'll have the right to know—a thing like this."

"Nonsense!" said Gilbert, and secretly cursed these modern ideas of frankness. Aloud he said: "There'll be plenty of time to consider what there is to tell—if anything. There may be nothing, you know. You wouldn't want to upset her needlessly."

"Oh, I'm sure you've guessed it right," said Norman dully. "It will be only a question of sooner or later when she'll have to know. I simply couldn't get married with a thing like that hanging over us. It would come out some time—and I'd rather know the worst at once. If things are going to smash, it had better be before we are married."

"Now, now," said Gilbert soothingly. "Nothing is going to smash. You're all worked up and incapable of seeing things clearly. Everything is coming out all right, I tell you."

"You mean that this thing can be hushed up, I suppose."

"Yes, if there's anything to hush up."

"That's all very well. So far as the world at large is concerned, perhaps it could be hushed up. But—why should two people be married, with a secret like that between them? What kind of marriage would that be?"

"Why, not so unusual a kind of marriage, I should say," replied Gilbert coolly. "You don't think men have to tell their wives everything, do you? By the way, have you told your fiancée anything at all about this Cambridge girl?"



"No, I haven't."

"You see, you've kept your little secret so far without any difficulty."

"But it didn't really concern her—or it didn't seem to—until now. It was only a part of my past, then—but now it affects our whole future."

"It won't affect her future, if you keep a decent silence and let me attend to it," said Gilbert. "Why didn't you tell her anything about the Cambridge girl?"

"Because it didn't seem of any great importance," said Norman. "And because she might be supposed to take something of that sort for granted. Perhaps I should have told her. It would make it easier now. But it would have hurt her feelings. I suppose that's the reason why I didn't."

"And a very good reason, too," said Gilbert. "You did as any lover would do. And you still love her, don't you?"

"Madge? Of course I do!"

"Yet now you seem to think the proper way to treat her is to inflict pain on her. I'd hate to believe you were that kind of moral weakling."

"I'm doubtless all sorts of moral weakling," said Norman, "but I don't know what you mean. It would take courage to tell her the truth."

"It will take more courage to keep your mouth shut," said Gilbert. "It's only the coward, the man who can't bear the burden of his own sins, that has to go and blab them to his wife or sweetheart. If

they're his sins, he ought to be the one to suffer for them—not she."

Their minds, Norman realized, didn't meet in this talk. There was a gulf of years between them. Old Gilbert was thinking of property and respectability, and not of human rights. And now he was talking about "sins." No doubt if one believed that an illegitimate child was a sin, one repented it—and forgot it. But it wasn't a sin to him; it was a fateful fact that had somehow to be faced.

"Why," old Gilbert was asking, "should a man want to drag the girl he loves into a thing like that—unless he wishes to hurt her?"

"I don't wish to hurt Madge. But she has a right to know what she's getting into," Norman insisted.

"And if she decided not to marry you—as she easily might, if you came blurting it out like that—?"

"That would be her privilege," said Norman, tonelessly.

"A nice privilege," Gilbert commented. "A choice between a humiliation and an outrage—a marriage broken off at the last moment, or a secret scandal."

"It's something she'll have to decide about in any case, sooner or later," said Norman. "And until she knows, the thing will be on my mind every moment. I shall feel like a dog, keeping it from her. She'll go on making plans for our marriage—and all the while there'll be this secret holding us apart."

"Do you think it would bring you together if you told her?" Gilbert asked ironically.

"I don't know. That's what I don't know. And I've got to find out. . . . Perhaps not . . . not unless she loved me a very great deal—more than I deserve. More than I've any right to expect."

"You'd like to give her a chance to prove how noble she is—how much she does love you: is that the idea? You'd throw her love for you into the gutter, to see whether she'd stoop and pick it up. I'm no psychologist, but I'd call that vanity."

Norman was silent.

"Or else mere inexperience," Gilbert went on. "You've just found out that some secrets are hard to keep. And because it hurts to keep a secret from the girl you love, you want to turn the world's morality upside down." That stab seemed to go home to its mark and Gilbert added:

"Misery loves company. You'd like to share your unhappiness. Natural enough, perhaps. But heroic? No. Selfish."

"Oh, you're probably right," said Norman, suddenly weary. "I suppose it wouldn't do to tell her. . . ."

Gilbert waited.

"Everything seems to me—smashed," said Norman. "But maybe something can be saved out of the wreck."

"If you'll follow my advice, quite a number of

things can be saved out of the wreck," said Gilbert. "Your marriage, your career, your father's pride."

"All right," said Norman quietly. "I'll do what you say. Just tell me what to do."

"I'm glad that you realize that you're in no state of mind to decide on anything final right now," said Gilbert. "I'll be very glad to take charge of your destinies for a few days. Then you'll feel differently."

"I've no doubt I shall. And I'll be able to thank you properly. Just now it seems scarcely to matter. . . ."

"That's all right. The thanks can wait. We'll proceed to the other aspects of the case—if it's settled that you are to be guided by me, and will say nothing about this to your fiancée till I get back from Chicago?"

"Yes, that's settled," said Norman. "You've made it clear to me what a lie and sham marriage is. The trouble with me, I guess, is that I've not quite grown up; I seem to have some remnants of boyish idealism left in my mind. I had thought that this marriage was going to be real—that we weren't going to have to lie to one another. I can see it's nonsense."

"Men," said Gilbert, "have lied to women since the dawn of history. The more they love them, the more they lie to them. You'll be surprised to find how easy it comes. But just the same, I don't think I had better trust that boyish idealism of yours too

far right now. If I leave you here while I go to Chicago to straighten things out, you'll have got them into some frightful mess by the time I'm back. I think I'd better take you along with me and keep an eye on you."

"I think that would be a good idea," said Norman. "I'll know the worst sooner. And if we could take the early train, I wouldn't have to see Madge to-night." In a shamefaced way he explained:

"We were going to go over to see our new house that my father's building for us: it's nearly finished. I don't think I could stand it."

"Very well," said Gilbert. "Make your apologies by telephone, and we'll take the six o'clock train this afternoon. Legal business in connection with the Ostrander case. I'll reserve a compartment, and we can talk all the way. There's still a lot to be gone over. And now you had better go home and pack."

#### CHAPTER IV: Post-mortem on a Dead Romance

“**N**OW,” said Gilbert Rand, in their compartment that evening, “do you want to tell me about this Cambridge girl, or shall I ask you questions?”

“You’d better ask me questions. It’s never seemed quite real to me. I haven’t readjusted myself to it as a reality even yet.”

Gilbert took out a pencil and paper.

“What was her name? I think you referred to her as Isabel.”

“Yes, Isabel Drury.”

Gilbert wrote it down.

The porter opened the door and looked in. “Did you ring, sir?”

“No, but we could do with a little more air.”

The porter opened the upper air-vents and went away.

Gilbert went on with the inquisition.

“Her age?”

“Twenty-five.”

“And yours was twenty-four. Well,” said Gilbert with satisfaction, “that clears up the matter of responsibility, at any rate. What was she? Stenographer, salesgirl, or what?”

“I suppose,” said Norman slowly, “you’d call her



an art student. She was studying art in Boston." He was finding it difficult to put this matter in objective terms. Isabel had been to him a romantic mystery and a psychological puzzle and a symbol of the strangeness of life. But that wasn't what old Gilbert wanted to know. . . .

"Art student." Gilbert wrote it down. "Where did she come from, do you know?"

Something of the satisfaction of old Gilbert's tone reached his mind. He began to see Gilbert's game. Isabel was to be made out as scarcely respectable. A Bohemian encounter. And, though that had in truth been the spirit of the affair, some perverse desire for fair play made him block that simple interpretation with some contrary facts.

"Her father was a professor of Latin in a boys' school. They had a place on the edge of Cambridge. Poor but terribly respectable." And he added: "I was a guest at their home, more or less, when it happened."

Gilbert frowned. "How did you come to know her?"

"The Drurys were neighbors of a classmate of mine. I spent a good many week-ends at his home. There were neighborhood parties, and Isabel was often there. We saw a good deal of each other that last winter and spring."

"What was your classmate's name?" Gilbert asked casually.

"Hal Sibley." Then Norman looked suspiciously

at his questioner. "See here, you mustn't get him mixed up in this!"

"Why do you say that?" Gilbert inquired blandly. "Was he interested in her too?"

Norman flushed. "We were both romantic about her. But leave Hal out of this." A disgust for these vulgar necessities of self-defense rose in him like nausea, and he said: "I couldn't forgive myself if I thought you were trying to do that!"

"Trying to do what?" asked Gilbert coldly.

"Shield me by dragging in my friend." Old Gilbert needn't pretend he didn't know what he was up to. "No, no—it won't do. I'm not that kind of coward."

"I only wanted, my boy," said Gilbert softly, "to take into account all the possibilities of the situation."

"Just the same, we'll leave Hal out of this discussion." A flicker of amusement in old Gilbert's eyes made him feel a little ridiculous, and he added defensively: "He wouldn't have dragged me in, if it had been he that was in this mess."

"You prefer not to consider that possibility?" asked Gilbert smoothly.

Norman had the feeling of having mismanaged this matter. He had made it look as though he were quixotically shielding his friend. "Oh, go into it if you insist," he said impatiently. "Only it's a waste of time. I merely wanted to make it clear that I'm not going to try to—sneak out of my responsibility."

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"Very well," said Gilbert, "we'll leave it at that for the present. Now as to the girl's family: any brothers?"

"No. An only child." And Norman reflected that a girl's brothers were her traditional protectors. That should please old Gilbert. He smiled; it was odd to think of Isabel as the menace against which he was being protected. He? His respectability, rather. The thing was out of his hands. Vickley was protecting itself. His career, his marriage, his reputation—these things belonged to Vickley. And old Gilbert had promised to guard them. . . .

"And the girl—" Gilbert was asking, "beautiful, I suppose?"

Her image came powerfully before him—her slight figure, her pointed face with its grey-green eyes and shock of auburn hair. Beautiful? "In a sullen, discontented way: yes." That, he thought, was sufficiently objective.

"And you fancied yourselves hopelessly in love with one another?"

"Not exactly." He must try to explain it to old Gilbert. "I had been crazy about her all year—ever since I met her. Hal had talked to me about her. His favorite word for her was 'elusive.' And she was just that. She played with us in an imaginative sort of way. But she seemed emotionally untouched. She was scornful of the idea of love."

"Yes?" said Gilbert.

"But when I was going away that summer, she seemed sorry we weren't going to see each other any more. I stayed over a couple of weeks, at the Sibleys, before I came home. We saw more of each other. She told me things about herself—her ambitions. And she took me to see Springer's pictures one day, just before I left. Coming back to her home that night, we lost ourselves in the woods. That was when we became lovers."

"You lost yourselves in the woods?"

"We pretended we were lost. You see, everything had to be play between us. We always pretended all sorts of things. That night we pretended it was a wood near Athens."

"A wood near Athens?"

"Midsummer-night's-dream stuff. Perhaps you'd understand it if you knew her."

"Was there ever any question of marriage between you?"

"There hadn't been, up to then. I had—well, I had wanted to have a love affair with her. That was all. But in the woods, afterward, I was rather frightened about what we had done, and I said we must get married. I suppose I meant it. But fortunately she didn't take me seriously. She laughed at me."

"She laughed at you?"

"You see, love wasn't a serious reality to her. It was just something to play at in idle moments. The

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only reality, to her, was art. She wanted to be a painter—a great painter.”

Old Gilbert rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Sort of Rosa Bonheur, eh?”

“I think she would have despised Rosa Bonheur. Gauguin was more in her line.”

“And so that was how it began?”

“Yes—and how it ended. I saw her for the last time the next day, before I went back to my rooms in Cambridge to pack. I didn’t get a chance to talk with her. She seemed to avoid that deliberately. She was more distant, more elusive, than ever.”

“Did you tell your friend Hal what had occurred?”

“Of course not.”

“And then you came home to Vickley.”

“Yes.”

“Did you write to her?”

“Three times. She didn’t reply.”

“You were not under the impression that you were her first lover?”

Norman hesitated. “I really know nothing about that. But for some reason I assumed that she had had lovers.”

“She seemed sophisticated?”

“In her talk, yes.”

“You didn’t ask her about her previous experiences?”

“One couldn’t have asked her a thing like that.

But I think she wanted it to be taken for granted."

Old Gilbert looked puzzled. "She wanted to have it taken for granted that she was not a virgin?"

"Yes. But afterward—I wasn't so sure. I'm not, now. Or rather—I think I was really her first lover, in spite of the way she talked."

Old Gilbert considered that helplessly, shook his head, and changed the subject.

"As to Springer," he asked, "was he married?"

"Not at that time. He's been married since then."

"How did Springer behave when she brought you to his studio?"

"Springer is a great clumsy bear. He's friendly with everybody, unless he's in one of his suspicious moods. He was very friendly that day."

"How well do you know him?"

"I've seen him only that once. Isabel told me a great deal about him."

"Does he make much money with his painting?"

"Not yet, I'm afraid. What are you getting at?" Norman demanded.

"Were Isabel and Springer very great friends?"

Norman smiled. "She admired his work very much."

"Do you think they had been lovers?"

"That idea had never occurred to me."

"Let's see," said Gilbert. "The girl was elusive for a long time—and then suddenly friendly. The day she took you to Springer's studio was the day



she made love to you. Do you make anything out of that?"

"Nothing at all."

"You thought of her as a mysterious and incalculable creature; but let us supply the *x* and see how the problem works out. She had been Springer's sweetheart. But Springer threw her over for another girl—the one whom he afterwards married. And so she consoled herself with you—perhaps trying to make him jealous. Doesn't that clear up the strangeness of her behavior?"

Norman tried hard to be objective. "It might be true. It merely doesn't fit in with my conception of Isabel."

"I've described a very human sort of girl," old Gilbert went on. "You had your romantic ideas about her, to be sure. Why shouldn't she be elusive, with Springer for her lover? Until he got himself another girl. Then she turned to you. I admit that this explanation is not calculated to appeal to a young man's vanity."

"After all, what does it matter?" said Norman.

But Gilbert seemed to think it did matter. "You offered to marry her," he pursued, "but in spite of what had occurred between you, she refused—because she was still in love with Springer. You wrote letters to her. It wasn't you she was thinking about; it was Springer. And when she found she was pregnant, it wasn't to you that she'd write, but to him.

Now, does it look," asked Gilbert, "as though she thought it were your child?"

"But, Good Lord—!" said Norman in bewilderment.

"Then Springer married the other girl; evidently refused to have anything more to do with her. And now at last she remembers you. In this emergency, your money would be a great convenience, no doubt."

Norman shook his head. "I can't believe that she'd lie to me," he said.

"If you had gone to see her," said old Gilbert with a tolerant smile, "she wouldn't have had to lie. She'd only have had to remind you of that night in the woods, and your guilty conscience would have supplied the rest."

"I wish to God I could believe it," said Norman.

"Would you rather," asked Gilbert, "believe yourself the father of her child?"

"What I wish," said Norman, "is that I could wake up and find that this was only a bad dream."

"That's the way it will seem to-morrow night," answered Gilbert cheerfully.

Norman turned toward the window, and stared out at the dark, flying landscape. Every moment was bringing him nearer to the truth. To-morrow he would know the truth. But—he wished he could see Isabel himself. This wasn't something that old Gilbert could handle for him.

## CHAPTER V: Encounter

IT wouldn't, he realized fully, be sensible to see Isabel. And besides, it would be unfair to old Gilbert. He had promised to leave his destinies to his friend's charge. He had better leave things as they stood.

When Gilbert left the hotel after breakfast to keep his appointment with the lawyers representing the other interests in the Ostrander case, it was with the understanding that they were to meet again at lunch for a final conference before Gilbert's visit to Dr. Zerneke.

When Norman was left alone in their suite at the hotel, he wondered what to do with himself in the meantime.

He went out and strolled up Michigan Boulevard. He passed the Steinbach Galleries.

Strolling back, he passed the Steinbach Galleries again.

Springer might be there, getting ready for his exhibit.

Norman turned and went in.

The place seemed to be empty. But as he went from one of the rooms to another, passing the little office, he heard young Steinbach's voice, and then Springer's.

He stopped, and sat down on a cushioned bench in the middle of the room, staring unseeingly across at a painting of a Pueblo Indian dance.

He supposed what he was doing was foolish. But he had to hear what Springer had to say—about him and Isabel. . . . For Springer would know about it all. Springer was her friend. . . . And if he could not go to see this doctor, if that must be left to Gilbert, yet here was something he could do, while he waited. . . . All Gilbert's carefully-built-up edifice of caution and secrecy melted into mist, in his mind.

He had been there three minutes when Springer came out of the office. Norman well remembered that dark bushy head and great lumbering frame. Norman rose.

Springer paused, glanced at him idly, and took out his watch and looked at it in a bored way.

There had been no recognition in that glance. Norman was disconcerted. He would have to introduce himself.

"Mr. Springer," he said.

Springer looked at him inquiringly. "Yes?"

"My name is Overbeck—Norman Overbeck." And, since that seemed to mean nothing to Springer, he added: "I met you a year ago in Boston."

Springer offered his hand with the embarrassment of one who had a bad memory in social matters. "Ah, yes," he said, with an effort at cordiality. "How are you?"

It wasn't at all what Norman had expected. It

was quite obvious that Springer didn't know who he was at all. So Isabel hadn't told him! Norman readjusted his mind to that.

"Well, how did you find Italy?" asked Springer absently, misled by some *ignis fatuus* gleam of false recollection.

Norman, ignoring this mistaken reference, said firmly: "Isabel Drury took me to your studio."

"Oh, yes!" said Springer. "You wrote a play. I remember now."

"No, I didn't write a play," said Norman indignantly. "I am a lawyer down in Vickley. I was at Harvard at the time, and"—he added—"a friend of Isabel's."

"I'm sorry," said Springer, confused and chagrined at his blunder. "I remember your face quite well. So you are one of Isabel's friends. Have you heard of her good luck?"

"Good luck?" Norman repeated, baffled.

"Yes, she's going to Paris. Some rich woman is subsidizing her for a year's study— isn't it fine!"

"Yes," said Norman. "But—"

He scarcely took in the news about Isabel's going to Paris.

Was it possible that Springer didn't know about what had happened to her? Or was he keeping that secret? Yes, naturally enough, a secret from an outsider. . . . That, Norman realized, was what he was to Springer—an outsider! Because Springer didn't know. Isabel hadn't told him that part of

it. Maybe he didn't know anything about it at all!

"How is Isabel?" Norman asked abruptly.

"Oh," said Springer, "she's all right."

"All right?"

Why should he say that? Did he mean anything? Did he know anything?

"I suppose," said Norman, as casually as possible, "that you keep in touch with her?"

"Well, yes," said Springer.

"I understand," said Norman, "that she's here in Chicago now."

"Why, yes, she is," said Springer reluctantly.

So it was true!

"I'd like to see her," said Norman. His heart was beating heavily. "Where is she?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, she's—not seeing anybody. She's just recuperating from an operation for appendicitis."

The usual lie! Springer said it with an air of protecting her from intrusive acquaintances. And Norman couldn't say: "You mean she's just had a baby!" No, he had to accept what Springer told him. He was an outsider.

"Is that so?" he said, and his voice mechanically took on the proper tone of sympathy and courteous interest.

Springer, having got past that point, spoke more fluently and easily. "She's going to Michigan to rest up for a few weeks, and then go on to Paris," he said.

Norman wanted to ask him at what hospital she was. But he felt that Springer would evade that question.

"I'd like to see her before she goes," he said.

"Are you going to be in town long?" asked Springer.

"No—a day or two."

"I'm afraid there's no chance," said Springer.

"I suppose not," said Norman.

The subject seemed closed.

"I'm having a show here next week," said Springer.

"Yes, I would like to see it," said Norman.

Springer held out his hand.

"Well, I may run into you here again," he said.

Norman was dismissed.

He was conscious of two emotions—of annoyance with Springer, and, strangely enough, of an enormous relief. It was all true! He hadn't doubted it, really, but something in his mind accepted this new evidence with gratitude. It was as though an unendurable tension had been relaxed. So Isabel had had a baby. . . .

And then it occurred to him that he didn't know whether her baby was alive or dead.

He had to go to see Dr. Zerneke.



## CHAPTER VI: Dr. Zerneke

HE went to a telephone booth. He did not need to look in the book: Dr. Zerneke's phone number was fixed in his mind.

A girl's voice answered the telephone. He gave his name.

"Yes, Mr. Overbeck," said the girl. "Dr. Zerneke is expecting you. Can you come right over?"

"I'll be there immediately," he said.

The taxi stopped in front of an apartment building on the North Side. The name, Dr. Martha Zerneke, was on a plaque in one of the front windows. He rang the bell, and a young woman admitted him.

He gave his name.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Just wait in here a moment, please."

She opened the door of the reception room, and went back to her desk.

He began to wonder why he had come. He ought to leave this part of it to Gilbert!

There were three women in the room. One by one they were called into an inner office by the office nurse.

Then it was his turn.

As he walked across the room, his mind whirled. But part of his mind didn't care. He would know the whole truth, now.

A small dark woman seated at a desk rose and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Overbeck."

"Dr. Zerneke?"

"Yes. You received my letter?"

"You asked me to come to see you."

"It is very good of you to come. Sit down, please."

Norman took the chair at the corner of the desk.

"My letter," said Dr. Zerneke, "wasn't very explicit, I'm afraid. But possibly you guessed something of its meaning. If you didn't, I can make the situation clear to you."

Norman had an impulse to delay matters, by pretending ignorance. If he had not talked with old Gilbert—if he had not met Springer—if he had walked in here unsuspectingly—what would she have said? She had offered just now to make the situation clear to him.

"Please do explain," he said.

"I'm sorry if my letter appeared unduly mysterious, Mr. Overbeck. You'll understand in a moment why I felt obliged to write as I did. The fact is that I need your assistance in a small technical matter."

So that, thought Norman, was how she would have begun!

"You said, I believe," he remarked, still keeping to his rôle of ignorance, "that it was of personal interest to me."

"Yes," she answered, "sufficiently so that I feel sure you will go to some little trouble to oblige us in the matter."

"I should be glad to do anything I can," he said. This, at least, was a way of postponing the inevitable for a few moments. He felt like a shipwrecked man who is holding to a plank and keeping his head above water while in the distance a great wave is sweeping down upon him. And at the same time he felt strangely calm.

"I am confident that you will, when I explain," said the doctor. "Your name has been given me by one of my patients under circumstances which oblige me to ask for your assistance and coöperation. The matter is a little unusual: that is why I go at it in this somewhat elaborate manner. And because of its character, I think I ought to begin by assuring you that the question of money is not involved. I want to make that plain first of all."

"I see," said Norman.

"Very well," said the doctor. "Now as to my patient. A year ago, Mr. Overbeck, if I am rightly informed, you were going to law school at Harvard."

"Yes," he said. The great wave hung overhead, about to fall.

"At that time you were acquainted with a girl

named Isabel Drury. Recently she has come under my care, and—”

Enough of this farce of ignorance!

“I know,” said Norman, “she has had a baby.”

“Oh—you know that?”

“It’s true, then!”

“Yes. And for certain reasons, Mr. Overbeck—”

“It’s—alive?”

“Oh, yes.”

“A—a boy or girl?”

“A boy. And for certain reason which I’ll explain in a moment, it is desirable to have a record of the paternity in these cases. It is for this purpose only, that Miss Drury has consented to allow me to communicate with you.”

“Tell me,” said Norman impatiently, “when did it happen?”

“What? Oh, the baby was born eleven days ago.—The matter,” she went on, returning to her argument, “is entirely a private one, you understand. . . .”

“How did she—come through it?” Norman asked.

“The delivery,” said the doctor, “was a somewhat difficult one, but she stood it very well.”

“She’s all right now?” Norman persisted.

“Oh, quite all right. She’ll be able to leave the hospital within a week or so.”

“And the baby?” asked Norman.

"The baby is a very healthy child. No physical defects. Six pounds at birth, now about six and a half."

"Isn't that rather small?" Norman asked anxiously.

The doctor smiled. "Not at all," she said, "especially not for a first child. A very good weight, in fact. And now as to yourself."

"Yes?" said Norman anxiously.

"Do you mind my asking you a few questions?" She drew a sheet of paper toward her. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-five," said Norman in surprise.

"Have you recently had a thorough medical examination?"

"I took out some insurance recently," he said, wondering what this was all about. "I was examined then."

"Will you take off your coat and vest, please?" she asked firmly.

He obeyed with some inward astonishment, and followed her into an inner office, where he was weighed on her scales, seated on a kind of trestle, and thumped and listened to in chest and back. . . . "Am I all right?" he asked haughtily when they went back into the other office.

The doctor smiled. "You seem to be. Don't put on your coat yet. Have any of your family ever had tuberculosis?"

"No," he said.

"Epilepsy?"

"No."

"Insanity?"

"No!"

"Roll up your sleeve, please."

He did so, obediently.

"This will only take a moment." She put a tourniquet around his upper arm and tightened it. She took out a queer shaped instrument of glass, partly wrapped with cotton, and with a needle on the end.

"What is that?" he asked curiously.

"A Kiedal tube," she replied. She sterilized the needle, and dabbed with alcohol a spot on the skin of his upper arm. "Double up your fist—hard."

She skilfully thrust the needle point into a swollen vein, and pressed upon the cotton about the tube, which immediately filled with blood. She withdrew the needle, took off the tourniquet, and dabbed again at his arm with alcohol.

"What is that for?" he asked.

"For a Kahn blood test," she replied. "Now you may put on your coat and vest. Can you give me a statement from your family doctor about your family history—as to the hereditary diseases I asked you about?"

"Why—I suppose so. Yes, I'm sure I can. But why do you want to know these things?"

"Oh—I thought I had explained that, Mr. Over-

beck. It is always desirable in these cases, when possible."

"But what is it all about?" he asked. "You see, I am engaged to another girl. Do you think I ought to marry Isabel, in order to legitimate the child? Is that why you sent for me?"

The doctor looked surprised. "Apparently I have not yet made the situation quite clear," she said. "No, that wasn't why I sent for you. It is, as I told you, merely a technical matter. With a medical record of paternity, showing that the child is free from hereditary disease, a more desirable adoption can be effected. There was no intention of embarrassing you further. As for these medical records, they will be sealed and filed with the St. Thecla Child Adoption Society, of which I am the medical director. These records are secret, and can't even be brought into court. Under these circumstances, I felt sure you wouldn't mind giving us this assistance."

"I—no; I mean yes," said Norman weakly, as with that word "secret" ringing in his mind the world righted itself from topsy-turviness and settled down about him—familiar, solid, secure. . . . He could marry Madge, his career would not be affected, everything would be just as old Gilbert had prophesied. . . .

"And I thank you very much," said the doctor, rising and holding out her hand.

"Then—that's all?" he asked.



"Yes, that's all—except for the family medical history that you promised to send me. You won't forget that?"

"No, I won't forget. But if you can spare the time—a moment or two—I'd like to know something further about what's going to be done with the baby."

"Certainly," said the doctor, resuming her seat. "I'll be glad to explain that to you. Just what is it you want to know?"

"Well," said Norman uncomfortably, "I really don't know—but I don't quite like the idea of adoption!"

"Yes," said the doctor, "some people feel that way. It offends them to think of the child being separated from its natural mother." And she went on, in an impersonal manner to speak of the different laws of different states—something about the mother having to keep her babies herself. . . .

"This," Dr. Zerneke commented, "is supposed to be good for the girl's character. In some cases, no doubt it is. And it at least makes it rather unlikely that those girls will have any more illegitimate babies. That, I sometimes think, is the real reason for putting that burden on them."

Norman felt confused by these generalizations. This wasn't exactly what he wanted to know. . . .

"Social workers believe, theoretically," the doctor went on, "that both parents should be held as strictly as possible to their responsibilities for children born

out of wedlock. But in actual practice that means compelling the girl to take care of the baby, with some inadequate financial aid, if any at all, from the man. . . .”

Norman would have felt indignant, except that she seemed to have forgotten that he was one of those men she was talking about. . . . Yes, she was ignoring his personal interest in the question altogether. She was treating him as though he were some visitor who had inquired about the work of her society. . . . It was queer. . . .

“The fact is,” she was saying, “that there isn’t any right solution of the problem of illegitimacy. If we had a decent civilization, any baby would be legitimate. To have babies is a natural function of women. But the penalties for having them outside of marriage are still pretty severe; and when there are homes where these children are wanted, there seems to be no reason for penalizing the children. That’s why we undertake to get these children adopted.”

“Yes, but—who is going to take Isabel’s baby?” Norman made himself ask.

“The Society has a large waiting list,” said the doctor. “The applicants are thoroughly investigated.”

“Do you mean that you can’t—or won’t tell me?”

“I shouldn’t think of telling you,” said the doctor.

“Why not?”

“It makes trouble in the future,” said the doctor.

"The adoptive parents want to be assured of untroubled possession of the child. The girl sometimes changes her mind and tries to get her child back."

"Then Isabel isn't to know who they are, either?"

"No more than you. If there were any chance of a parent turning up later to reclaim the child, they would refuse to take it. You can see that, Mr. Overbeck."

"And Isabel agrees to this?"

"She trusts us to do the best for the child."

"Has she—signed over the child yet?"

"Not yet. If you have any doubts of the Society I represent, Mr. Overbeck, its record is easily looked up. In fact, Mr. Overbeck, since you are a lawyer, I wish you would make an investigation, and advise Miss Drury accordingly. The one thing we are anxious to avoid is the charge of exerting undue influence upon the mothers of these children."

Norman was conscious of a feeling of frustration which he could not quite understand.

"I shall certainly make inquiries about the Society," he said. "But I might remind you that there are my rights, as well as the mother's, to be considered."

"I'm sorry to have to correct you on a legal point," said the doctor drily, "but the fact is that you have no legal rights to or over Miss Drury's child."

"Is that true?"

"You'll find it to be quite true, Mr. Overbeck."

Norman was silent for a long moment. Then he looked up and said:

"I must see her—Isabel. Can I?"

"Certainly," said the doctor, "as far as I am concerned. If she wishes to see you."

"Why shouldn't she wish to see me?" Norman demanded.

"She may feel that the fact that you are her child's father gives you no special claim upon her."

"Why do you say that?"

"She was quite unwilling for me to communicate with you at all. She particularly said that she did not wish to see you."

"She said that?"

"But she may feel differently about it now. I am only warning you."

"I'll call her up and ask her," said Norman grimly.

"I'll call up for you, if you like, right now, and find out."

"Do, please," said Norman coldly.

"Do you wish to see her this morning?"

"The sooner the better."

The doctor lifted the receiver and called the number.

"Obstetrical B, please. . . . Miss Higginson? This is Dr. Zerneke. Please send word to Miss Drury in Room 37 that Mr. Norman Overbeck would like to visit her this morning. . . . Yes, Over-beck."

Norman waited.

"Yes. . . . She will? Thank you."

Dr. Zerneke turned to Norman. "It's all right. You can go at eleven. But I will have to remind you that emotional scenes are not good for nursing mothers. And don't stay longer than fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Very well," said Norman, and rose impatiently.

## CHAPTER VII: Flowers

**H**IS taxi passed a florist's shop, and he leaned forward and pounded on the window. "Stop a minute. Yes, right here."

It might be ridiculous— But why should it be ridiculous? A girl who had a baby, a girl in bed in a hospital, would like to have flowers brought by a visitor, surely. Any girl!

In the shop, he looked about at the banked flowers in uncertainty.

"We have some very nice American Beauty roses," said the salesman, leading him toward the glass fronted refrigerator. He took out a bunch of long stemmed buds. "Fifteen dollars a dozen." Norman felt uncomfortable. He was vaguely apprehensive of the emotional inappropriateness of American Beauty roses for this occasion.

Something yellow caught his eye. "Jonquils," he said. "Let me see those."

"A dollar a dozen," said the salesman, without enthusiasm.

Norman hesitated. A husband, a lover, a dear friend, might give the yellow flowers she liked. But what was he? Isabel had always that power of making him feel at a loss. From a moment of intimacy she could withdraw herself until he felt in-

finitely remote, the most casual of acquaintances, almost a stranger.

He bought the roses.

In the taxi, he had a disconcerting picture of himself, with stick and gloves and tissue-wrapped bouquet. It seemed altogether too jaunty. He felt like a silly-ass character in a story by P. G. Wodehouse. Vindictively he accused himself of being really that—a superficial person, with no capacity for dealing with the serious aspects of life. Yes, what should a P. G. Wodehouse young man be doing in a Tolstoian situation? But real life seemed to be like that.

Abruptly he knocked on the glass window. "Drive back to that florist's," he ordered.

The driver turned the corner, rounded the block, and drew up at the florist's shop again.

"Give me two dozen jonquils," said Norman to the salesman.

When they were wrapped up and paid for, he handed back the other bouquet. "You can keep these," he said, and walked out.



## CHAPTER VIII: Isabel

THE taxi brought him to the hospital a few minutes after eleven. He went up to Obstetrical Ward B. To a nurse who sat at a desk in the corridor he gave his name. "I would like to see Miss Drury in room thirty-seven."

"Just a minute," said the nurse, and pressed a button on her desk. Presently another uniformed young woman appeared. "Take this visitor to room thirty-seven, Miss Paget."

He accompanied the young woman down the corridor.

She tapped at a door, opened it slightly, and glanced in. "A visitor for you," she said, and ushered Norman in.

On a small high bed lay Isabel, her pointed face framed in loosely strewn locks of short auburn hair against her pillow. She raised her head a little as the door closed behind him.

"Oh," she said, and smiled, "it's you." A thin arm was withdrawn languidly from under the coverlet, and a hand was offered to him. It seemed strangely frail for her hand. She seemed queerly thin and white. He put his hat, stick and bouquet upon the little table by the bed, and bent over her hand. A sudden emotion flooded him so that he

could not speak for a moment. He held her thin hand to his lips. He would have dropped on his knees beside the bed—but that would have been awkward, the bed was so high. His sense of the ridiculous helped him to recover his self-possession.

"Isabel!" he said.

"Yes, here I am," she said. "Who would have thought it would come to this?" Her face was lit up by one of her amused ironic perceptions. How well he knew that look!

"The wood near Athens," he said.

"Yes—the wood near Athens! But do sit down, Norman."

He drew the chair up close to her bed.

"I hope you understand," she went on, "that it really isn't my fault you've been dragged into all this. Dr. Zerneke explained everything to you, didn't she?"

He nodded, not quite able to trust himself to speak.

"I didn't think I'd see you at all," she said. "I thought it would be simpler not to. But when you called up, that seemed to me rather silly."

"Why didn't you want to see me?" he asked.

"Well—everything was settled, and I didn't want things upset. I haven't got my strength back yet, and I didn't feel equal to arguing with you. I remembered you as being rather controversially conventional, you know."

"I suppose I am rather conventional," he said

humbly. "But what did you think my attitude would be, about this?"

"Oh, I thought you might be shocked at the idea of my deserting my child. I thought you might preach the duties of motherhood to me—that sort of thing. You remember, we once had an argument about it. You thought woman's destiny after all was the home. I suppose it is, for most of them. But I've got to paint, Norman. I can't give up my life to a baby. Please don't think I'm heartless. But I'm not going to let a biological accident change my whole life."

"Why didn't you tell me about it?" Norman asked abruptly.

"Well, I didn't know for a long time."

"You didn't know!"

"At least I wouldn't believe it. I was an awful fool, Norman. You see, I'd always thought of myself as an artist—not a woman. I simply couldn't admit the possibility of such a thing as my having a baby. You remember, when you were afraid this might happen, and I laughed and said oh, it would be all right? That was just my sublime egotism!" She laughed. "I thought it *couldn't* happen to me."

"But you found out you were a woman after all," he said solemnly.

She stirred restlessly beneath the coverlet. "I found out that my body is a woman's body," she said. "And that still seems queer to me. Yes,

apparently it's true that this body of mine is a baby-factory, just like other girls' bodies. And what a strange and cumbersome process it is, Norman! I've a good chance to observe it, you see. I was under ether during the final crisis, so I can't speak of that. But I saw and felt enough to make me wonder at women—why they stand for it, being made use of this way as baby-producers. I suppose Nature traps them into it—and then they accept their fate. But I'm not going to! My body has been used nine months for a purpose that I never consented to—used and occupied and then torn and mangled—but I'm free now at last, and I'm going to stay free. My body may be a woman's body, but my thoughts are not a woman's thoughts. I have something else to do than take care of a baby! And even my silly body seems to know that at last.—I'm supposed to be a milk-producing animal now, a kind of contented cow with bloated udders. But my milk is drying up. Dr. Zerneke says it is because of my mental conflict. My mind, you see, is resuming possession of my body. Soon it will be all mine again. And then I shall be a painter once more, and never a woman again, Norman.

"And yet," she continued, "there has been one good thing about it. It has set me free from my family. They've repudiated me, thank God!—let me go my own way at last. I suppose that was why I could be so calm about it, and practically think nothing about it for so many months. I had nothing

to lose when the truth came out—except my respectability. Nothing to lose but my chains, and a world to gain, as the soap-box orators say. And it was worth it. I comforted myself with that thought, Norman, when the pain came—that I was giving birth to a bastard child, and my shocked family would never lay loving hands on me again to drag me back into the fold. I was buying my freedom at last by going through that torture.”

“Don’t!” said Norman involuntarily.

“I’m sorry!” she laughed and reached out a white hand and patted his bent head as though he were a child. “I shouldn’t have talked that way. Poor boy, I’ve shocked you again. I suppose you came here to see a Madonna. I never could live up to your romantic expectations, Norman. You’d better stop trying to understand me. There’s no reason why you should be bothered. It’s no concern of yours.”

“It seems to me,” said Norman, choking a little as he tried to speak, “that it—is—a concern of mine.”

“I didn’t intend that it should be. Did it upset you when you heard about it?”

“Naturally it upset me. But Dr. Zerneke’s letter was so diplomatic that at first I didn’t know what it was all about.”

“That’s my fault. I made her promise to write very diplomatically. I thought of you in the bosom of your family there in Vickley—you might have

forgotten the girl who led you astray back in Cambridge. I told her to say that I was the girl who took you to Springer's studio."

"She mentioned Springer," said Norman, and he thought of all the trouble that mention had caused—old Gilbert's surmises of double-dealing. How far away that coil of respectability seemed now!

"I saw him at Steinbach's this morning," he said.

"Springer? Yes, he has a show on at Steinbach's next week. He's done some very fine things. You ought to see them."

"He spoke of you."

"He and Roberta have been very good to me. I don't know what I'd have done without them. It's nice, too, his being in Chicago now. I have somebody to talk to. And he's got me a place to stay, in Michigan, until I'm able to stand the trip across. You've heard of my luck, I suppose? I'm going to study in Paris! I owe that to them, too. They've found me the sort of patron every young artist dreams about. A rich woman in Boston is giving me my traveling expenses and fifteen dollars a week for a year. With three hundred francs a week in Paris, I shall feel that I own the world!"

"Does Springer approve of—your plans?"

She frowned. "Springer is a dear," she said, "but he can't forget that I am a woman, and he doesn't believe that women *can* be artists in a serious way. See what he's done to Roberta—"

"Roberta is his wife, I take it?"



She nodded. "Roberta had a great deal of promise as a painter. But she's settled down to just being a painter's wife. I think that's why she has done all these things for me—to give me my chance."

"Then *he* doesn't think you ought to go to Paris?"

"He doesn't say anything about it. But he's not very enthusiastic."

"What does he want you to do?"

"I don't know. Secretly, I suppose, he thinks I ought to give up my career and live for my child. Something of that sort."

"And you consider that—quite out of the question, I suppose."

"Yes, Norman. I've tried to tell you why. And I don't think any sort of compromise would do—such as keeping the baby and going on with my career. I'd not be a good mother. It just wouldn't work out. It wouldn't be good for the child to have a mother like that. The only sensible thing is to have the baby adopted by people who do want one."

"Even if you know nothing of these people, Isabel?"

"Dr. Zerneke knows them. And I'm sure they couldn't be worse parents than I should be!"

"Suppose," said Norman, "they should be conventional people—and the boy should inherit your talent. They wouldn't understand him. They'd try to discourage him."

"If he were an artist, that wouldn't keep him from being one." Then Isabel smiled. "But why not sup-



pose that he will inherit your traits, Norman? That's quite as likely. And then he'd get along perfectly well in his bourgeois environment."

"So that's what you think of me—as a perfectly bourgeois person," said Norman.

"You've managed to make terms with the world you live in," she said, "I thought you got along with it very comfortably."

"So I did," he said, "until yesterday—when this thing came up. This has knocked the foundations of my old life to pieces."

"I'm sorry," said Isabel. "I hope it's not as bad as that. This needn't affect your life."

"It does," said Norman. "There's no use pretending. Isabel, won't you marry me?"

She took his hand between both of hers for a moment. "It's terribly sweet of you to want to, Norman. But we've already discussed that, back at Cambridge. You remember."

"I remember that you didn't want to marry a bourgeois young lawyer and settle down to a life of teas and bridge in Vickley," he said. "But now—I'm afraid you'd not be marrying a prosperous lawyer in Vickley, Isabel. You'd be marrying"—he smiled—"a ruined man and an outcast."

"You make it very attractive, Norman," she said. "It's a temptation to marry you, just to ruin you. But the trouble is, the marriage which would be your ruin would make me a respectable woman again. I can't venture that. I've too recently escaped from

prison to give up my freedom. I won't marry you, Norman."

"Is that your real reason?" he asked.

"Marriage is marriage, Norman. I'm going to Paris to paint. You want to keep me here, looking after your baby. No, thank you."

"Is that the real reason?" he repeated.

"What else? Oh, I suppose you mean, do I love you?"

"Perhaps that's what I do mean. But I suppose I know the answer already."

"If I weren't going to be a painter, I could love you, Norman. If I were a real girl, I'd be proud to have your babies. I'm sorry, for your sake—and perhaps for my own—that I'm such a queer monster as I am, and—and not a nice girl for you, Norman."

She turned her head away from him and flung her arm up to cover her face. She was crying.

"Go away," she said, after a moment.

He thought with a thrill that this wild girl might yet be conquered. . . . And then he remembered that he mustn't upset Dr. Zerneke's patient.

He rose, contritely.

She found a handkerchief under her pillow, and wiped her eyes, and turned toward him. He was fumbling with the tissue wrappings of the bouquet.

"Oh, flowers!" she cried. And then, as he unwrapped them: "Jonquils! I love them! How nice of you to remember!"

She is a girl, after all! thought Norman.

"Put them in the water pitcher," she told him.

He did so.

"And now come here and kiss me."

He bent over her, and their lips touched. What did that kiss mean? Gratitude, to be sure. A lonely girl in a hospital. . . . He wished he could believe it was more.

"Norman, dear," she said softly, "will you forgive me for being—what I am?"

"But are you that, really?" he asked. "I wish I knew!"

"Yes—yes—yes!" she cried, raising herself up from her pillow. "Don't be fooled by a few silly tears, Norman. The real me is in Paris now, sitting before an easel in a paint-smeared smock. You've found me weak and helpless, but I've that hope. And if I didn't have it, as God knows I mightn't have—if I didn't have Paris to look forward to and three hundred francs a week for a year and no questions asked—if I had been penniless and scared, I might have married you, Norman. But you'd only have had my woman's body—my thoughts would never have stayed with you. That's the truth, and we're both lucky to have escaped such a trap. Think! if you'd given up everything for me, and then found you could never really have me—and if I had given up my dreams for food and shelter—we'd have hated each other, Norman."

"It isn't just us," he said. "Isabel, it's our son. Couldn't we—"

She bit her lip and shook her head.

"Besides," she said, "you're engaged to another girl. Hal told me so."

"What does that matter, now?"

"She'll give you another son."

"Doesn't," he asked desperately, "doesn't it mean anything to you?"

"Why," she asked wonderingly, "should our child mean so much to you? You've never even seen him."

"I want to see him."

"You can. But don't you understand—"

"I understand that he would interfere with your career, yes," said Norman harshly.

"Hate me if you want to. But I am what I am. And if I've nursed this baby at my breast, and still think of myself as an artist and not as a mother—" She paused. . . . "Norman—I fought out this wife and mother business once before—when I was eighteen. I was engaged. And I was really in love . . . more than I ever will be again. But I saw what marriage would do to me, and I wouldn't go through with it. My mother tried to make me. But I wouldn't—I couldn't. I settled it for myself then that I was going to be an artist, and not a wife and mother. I don't suppose you'll ever understand. But there's no use arguing with me. I've my own road to go."

"But to give your child away to strangers—!" he protested bitterly.

She sank back on her pillow. "I can't talk to you any more," she said wearily. "You'd better go."

"I want to see my son," he said stubbornly.

"The nurse will show you."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to upset you. And—I'll try to understand your point of view. . . ."

"Good-by," she said. "And thank you for the flowers."

There was a tap at the door.

"Yes?" said Isabel. "I think," she said to Norman, "that's the baby now."

## CHAPTER IX: The Baby

THE door opened, and an angular, old-maidish-looking nurse entered with a baby in her arms. "Feeding time," she said.

She went to the bed and laid the baby down beside Isabel. "I'll bring the bottle," she said, and went out.

"It's a good thing," said Isabel, "that this is a bottle feeding. I'm not supposed to go through scenes like this—it's not good for my milk."

Norman looked down at the baby in a kind of terrified curiosity. It was a very tiny thing, with a round face, and some blond hair like his own on the queer-shaped skull. The blue eyes blinked up at him sleepily.

"Yes," said Isabel, "this is what we have been rowing about." She turned to the baby. "This man thinks I ought to take care of you," she said. "But you know better, don't you? I'm a very poor mother, I haven't even enough milk for you, and the little I have is not up to standard. You won't be sorry to see the last of me." She smiled at Norman. "Well," she said, "he's a healthy little bastard, isn't he?"

Norman flinched at the word.

"Well, he is, you know," said Isabel. "And he's

too young to have his feelings hurt by mentioning it. You and I ought to be able to face the fact. After all, Norman, it's the sort of thing that happens quite regularly and inevitably in every civilized country on the globe. Do you happen to know the statistics for illegitimacy? I made Dr. Zerneke give me something to read about it. It's very interesting. It seems that in the United States about one in every forty-two births is illegitimate. I've been figuring it out. Sixty thousand illegitimate births a year comes to about a hundred and sixty-four a day, or seven an hour, or one every eight minutes and twenty seconds. Statistics are very consoling. They take away the uniqueness of one's discomforts."

He was looking at the baby. Gradually it had become thoroughly awake. It stretched its arms, and yawned magnificently. Its lips began to make sucking movements. Its face grew red, and broke into a wrinkled grimace of anger.

Isabel went on talking. "Every year—you see, I've had nothing to do for days except to study statistics—out of every hundred and fifty-nine unmarried females of childbearing age, one gives birth to an illegitimate child. This year it so happened that the lot fell to me."

A loud wail came from the little bundle.

"I've nothing for you," said Isabel. "You'll have to wait for your bottle."

"Why is his head such a queer shape?" asked Norman.



"You ought to have seen it at first. It was pulled out of shape getting into the world. It's getting to look all right now."

The baby's wails grew more insistent.

"Just a minute, young man," said Isabel.

"Have you—named him?" asked Norman.

"Well," said Isabel, a little embarrassed, "it really makes no difference—the people who are going to have him will never know, and they'll name him all over again. But when I first saw him, he did look so much like you! Do you mind?"

"You named him Norman?"

"When the doctor was making out the birth certificate, she told me I'd have to give him some sort of first name—the first one that came into my head would do, she said. And that was the first one that came into my head. I know I shouldn't have done it. But it doesn't really implicate you, Norman."

"Why the devil," asked Norman, "should you be so considerate of *me*?"

"Because it wasn't your fault, Norman. You didn't know you were going to be let in for anything like this. You've your own life to live. It wouldn't be fair."

"If—for any reason—" he said, "you had decided to keep the baby, what would you have done then—about me?"

"I'd never have told you anything about it at all. It would have been my baby. I don't see why you should be asked to support it, in any case."

"But I think that's silly," said Norman. "Because I could support it—and you couldn't."

"Oh, yes, I could. Girls do, you know. And I'll tell you this. I didn't intend to, but I will. . . . You see, when a girl is going to give up her baby for adoption, she doesn't nurse it at all, and never sees it—except just once, before she signs the papers. They manage it that way for fear of arousing the maternal instinct. Because usually, after a girl has nursed a baby, she wants to keep it. But that seemed to me a cowardly thing to do. I told Dr. Zerneke I'd nurse my baby, and take my chances of my maternal instinct being aroused. I didn't explain to her, but I can tell *you*—it was a kind of test of myself: whether I was destined to be a mother or a painter. I decided that if I felt like keeping the baby, I would—I'd get a job of some kind and give up my year in Paris and everything—stop painting, and be a regular female. . . . Well, you see, my milk is drying up! And I don't feel at all like a mother—I still want to paint! So that's why—"

"I see," said Norman.

Yes, he thought bitterly, if she were a real mother, she'd be interested in comforting that crying baby, instead of explaining her psychology!

The spinsterish-looking nurse came in efficiently with the bottle.

"I think your visitor has been here long enough," she said firmly.

"I'm going," said Norman.

He gathered up his hat and stick. "I'll see you again, if I may."

"Yes, do," said Isabel.

"Here, precious!" said the nurse, cooingly, "here's your itsie bottsie-wottsie."

Norman heard her crooning over his child as he went out the door.

## CHAPTER X: Art Alone Endures

OUTSIDE of the hospital he hailed a taxi, and gave the name of his hotel.

Coming out of some reverie too deep to remember, he looked out of the window and saw that he was on Michigan Boulevard, passing the Art Institute. On an impulse, he stopped the taxi, and went in.

He climbed the wide stair to the large room in which the treasures of the place were on view—a miscellaneous lot of treasures: some of them, like Bougereau's bather, cheapened by time's changes in the realm of taste; none but the ignorant now stopped to admire the high lights on those perfect and polished toe-nails. And poor Gilbert Stuart—what an irony for a painter to be cherished because of the historical importance of one of his subjects! But here was, at least, a Van Dyck. Norman paused in front of it. . . . And from somewhere out of a memory whose leisure hours for some years had been given to connoisseurship in the art of painting, there leaped out the irrelevant fact that Van Dyck had had an illegitimate child in the Netherlands; the mother being unknown to history. . . . He passed on.

He did not know what he was looking for. . . . Possibly for some proof that art was as important

as he had always taken for granted that it was. These artists starved and painted, attained—if they were lucky—the heights of fame, and left pictures that eventually found their way to some American gallery. That seemed to be the final, ironic goal of all their striving. It was, no doubt, very improbable that this willful girl would ever achieve any sort of fame. But if she did, beyond her wildest dreams—then, some day, a troubled young man would stand in front of some picture of hers, and remember that she was said to have had an illegitimate child in America.

“The father,” he murmured half aloud, “being unknown to history.”

Yes, times were changing. Women were taking the privileges of men. And that careless masculine privilege of leaving behind an illegitimate child or so in the course of one’s career—that, too. Van Dyck hadn’t been stopped in his painter’s progress by a mere illegitimate child: why should Isabel Drury be?

Oh, no doubt there was something to be said for her attitude. And it was important, doubtless, that she have her chance to paint a picture that would be bought after her death for a fabulous sum by an American millionaire. Just why it was important he could not at the moment seem to be able to tell himself. But he had always known that it was important. . . .

A fragment of a poem of Gautier’s flickered into

his mind. "*Tout passe. La vers souveraine demeurent.*" That had impressed him greatly when he read it at college. All passes; sovereign verse—or, as in this case, painting—lasts. . . .

To be sure. Children grow up; become old; die. Paint on canvas stays young. More or less. Less rather than more, to tell the truth. Paint ages, too. The gloom into which Whistler's paintings are already fading. . . . An accident, perhaps. Isabel didn't use that kind of a palette. She was a post-Impressionist. . . . But styles decay, too. *Pointillisme*—how quaint it looks already! Picasso—will he and all his manners seem to another generation as futile as Meissonier? . . . This whole age: was it perhaps afflicted, as some said, with a spiritual sickness? Was it because of something morbid in his own mind that he had ever been drawn to it? . . . A bourgeois thing to think!

But then, he was a bourgeois: no doubt of that. What did he know about art? He had enjoyed the belief that he knew a great deal. And that did no harm—it would encourage him to buy some poor devil's pictures; and if he guessed right, he could present them to a museum. That was his function—to buy pictures. . . . Some day he might have the privilege of buying some of Isabel's.

When he was dead, his widow would call in an expert and ask, "Are these worth anything?" If they weren't, she would burn them up as trash—the mere record of a girl's vain dreams. If the expert

said, "Oh, yes, indeed, madam, those are very fine early Drurys!"—then they would pass into the possession of some millionaire. They would fetch a good price. . . . But the man who bought them wouldn't know how cheap they were at any price. . . . He would be getting, not just paint and canvas and a name, but the milk that had dried up in Isabel's breasts, the love that she had kept from her baby, the hope that she had refused to squander on a mere living child—all that she had saved up and put into her masterpieces rather than waste in motherhood: that's what he would be getting for his money. And when after dinner he took his guests for a stroll through his gallery, and— But this was mere sentimentality. . . .

Norman awoke from his reverie, in front of Millet's picture of the new-born calf being brought home by two peasants on a straw-covered litter, the mother cow following along and licking her baby. . . . Silly sentimentalists, cows. Didn't they know their real business was to produce cream for the tables of the bourgeoisie? And Millet—a damned sentimentalist, himself. Any post-Impressionist would say so. . . .

Norman remembered suddenly his luncheon engagement with old Gilbert. They were to meet at the hotel.

He hurried out.



## CHAPTER XI: Common Sense

“WELL,” said old Gilbert, at the table in the corner of the hotel dining room, “how have *you* been spending your morning?”

“I went to see Dr. Zerneke,” said Norman. “I couldn’t wait.”

Old Gilbert stopped wiping his mouth and threw his napkin violently on the table.

“I’ll be damned!” he said. “I suppose I ought to have known it.”

“I couldn’t stay away,” said Norman. “I had to know.”

“Well, and what did you find out?”

“Your guess was true, of course. It’s Isabel Drury. She had her baby eleven days ago.”

“I’ve had time to find out that much myself,” said Gilbert. “I had some one call up all the hospitals in town for me. What I want to know is what kind of mess you’ve got yourself into.”

“If I haven’t got myself into a mess,” said Norman, “it’s not my fault, I’m afraid. I didn’t try to deny anything. But all that this doctor wanted—”

“Yes, what did she want?”

“She wanted to find out whether the baby has a healthy father. The people who are planning to adopt the child wished to be sure of that, it seems.”

"Yes—and what else?"

"That appears to be all. She was at great pains to assure me that I had no further responsibility in the matter. When I've furnished her with some more medical data, I can dismiss the matter from my mind entirely, I gather."

"The girl makes no claim on you?"

"None at all."

Old Gilbert looked immensely relieved.

"Tell me," said Norman, "have you ever heard of the Thecla Child Adoption Society?"

"Yes," said Gilbert. "I've looked that up too."

"Is it a reputable organization?"

"Perfectly. And I had Dr. Zerneke looked up, too."

"You found her to be all right?" asked Norman.

"Professional reputation unimpeachable, it seems. Why?"

"Well—about the adoption matter."

"That's all right. They'll handle it in the right way. I found out something about their work. And if you've been assured that your secret will be kept, you've nothing to fear from them."

"I didn't mean that, precisely."

"What, then?"

"I was thinking—of the child."

"They know their business. The child will be put in good hands. You needn't worry about that."

Old Gilbert once more gave to his lunch the attention it deserved. "You see," he said comfortably

between mouthfuls, "things have turned out all right after all—just as I said they would. And now that you've had your mind put at ease, I think you'd better go right home. There's no point in your hanging around Chicago."

"Why do you want me to go home?" asked Norman.

"Because I think well enough is best left alone," said Gilbert. "Everything is all right now, and that's a good way to leave it."

"You mean that you're afraid I might go to see Isabel?"

"You're safer, I think, back in Vickley."

"Well—I might as well tell you that I saw her, too. And the baby."

"You *have* taken this case into your own hands, with a vengeance," said old Gilbert in discouragement. "I was a damned fool ever to bring you here. Well, tell me the worst at once. Did you offer to marry her?"

"I asked her to, and she refused."

"You asked her to!—and she refused? You certainly have fool's luck. But why did she refuse you?"

"For the same reasons as before. It would interfere with her career."

"That's beyond me. But I suppose she has her reasons. Lord, what a tight squeak! You don't know how lucky you are! But I suppose you thought that was the noble thing to do—offer to marry her!

You didn't happen to remember, I suppose, that you were engaged to another girl."

"It didn't seem to make any difference."

"Boy, she might have taken you up. You were putting your head into the lion's mouth!"

"Oh, I knew what I was doing. And it wasn't just a noble gesture. I was quite ready to let everything else go to hell."

"Good Lord, you're as much infatuated with her as all that?"

"No. I'm not even sure that I love her at all."

"Do you mean to say that you offered to marry her just to make an honest woman of her?"

Norman laughed. "Nothing like that."

"Then why in the name of God did you offer to marry her? Can you tell me that?"

"That seemed the simplest thing to do," said Norman.

"I think you're a little mad," said old Gilbert.

"I don't know," said Norman. "I suppose it was foolish. Any way, she wouldn't."

"Fortunately," said Gilbert, "she seems to be just as crazy as you are! What would your father think of me if I took you here to Chicago and let you get into a mess like that, right under my nose!"

"Well, you needn't worry about it," said Norman. "I shan't ask her again."

"I should hope not!" said old Gilbert.

"I saw Springer this morning." And then Nor-

man was sorry he had mentioned it. Gilbert would commence again on his suspicions.

"What is *he* doing here?" asked Gilbert.

"Getting ready for his exhibit."

"Oh, you went to see him?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did *he* say?"

"He didn't know me. He said Isabel had appendicitis. His wife has found her a rich patron, and she's going to Paris to study."

"I've been wondering who was paying her expenses," said Gilbert.

"I suppose you still wish to think that Springer is mixed up in this affair," said Norman, "and that something is being put over on me. But I am convinced that you are wrong. And I have acknowledged the child as my own."

"I've only been trying to act as your friend in this matter, Norman. Of course, if you are convinced that the child is yours, there's nothing more to say on that score. The only question is, what do you propose to do about it? Publish the fact from the housetops? I appreciate your honorable scruples. They seem to me excessive, I must admit. But you have acted upon them—you have offered to marry the girl; and she has declined your offer. The question of money does not seem to be involved. If it were a matter of paying the girl's expenses—or if she wanted to keep the child herself—I'm sure

you would wish to be generous. As it is, there seems to be nothing more that you can do. Dr. Zerneke will find a good home for the child. The girl will go ahead and paint pictures. And you will go back to Vickley and resume the practice of law. That is the situation as I see it. The matter is closed. It has been very exciting, and no doubt instructive. But it's all over."

"Yes," said Norman, and sighed. "I suppose it is all over." All except remembering, and thinking, and wondering—and he'd have the rest of his life for that.

A picture flashed into his mind. An absurd picture—a melodramatic picture. He was older, and driving a car slowly through a Chicago street at night. A young man, with a revolver in his hand, stepped in front of the car and called, "Stop!" But he bent his head and stepped hard on the gas. A bullet grazed his cheek like a knife, and then he became aware that the car was dragging a dead, mangled body. And somehow he knew that it was his son's. . . .

He pulled himself back to reality, and smiled wanly at the absurdity of his fancies.

"Well," old Gilbert was saying, "this business has turned out remarkably well, considering everything. We can go back to the status quo ante without a qualm. We take the eleven o'clock train to-night. You'll be here at ten ready to go?"

"Yes," said Norman, "I'll be ready."

## CHAPTER XII: Bad Dreams

**B**UT what could he do that afternoon? . . .  
Two o'clock found him back in Dr. Zerneke's waiting room.

"Have you looked us up?" asked Dr. Zerneke cheerfully, when he was admitted to her office.

"If I were a poor devil of a soda-fountain clerk," said Norman, "and Isabel a stenographer I had got into trouble—what would you do?"

"Just what I have done in this case," said Dr. Zerneke. "The rest, so far as I am concerned, would be up to you and her. Did you ask her to marry you?"

"Yes," said Norman. "And she refused."

"I thought that was what would happen," said the doctor. "She's a very determined young woman. And all women are not to be forced into a single mold. She wants her career. So we must find the child a proper home."

"Yes, I understand that," said Norman. "But what I object to is this business of turning the baby over to strangers!"

"They are not strangers to the Society," said Dr. Zerneke. "We have more applicants than we have babies, and as I told you, they are very thoroughly investigated. We know all about them."



"But I don't," said Norman stubbornly.

"I'm afraid that can't be helped," said Dr. Zerneke. And then she repeated her question: "Have you made inquiries about the work of our Society?"

"Oh," said Norman, "I've no doubt your Society is all right. But—" He paused helplessly.

"I was sure you would come to that conclusion," said Dr. Zerneke. And then, as he sat there, silent and troubled, she added: "I don't wish to take advantage of your situation, Mr. Overbeck, but if it would help to ease your feelings the Society would be glad to accept a check to help carry on its work."

"Yes," he said, "I'll be glad to do that."

He took out his check-book and his fountain-pen, and started to write. But suddenly he laid down his pen.

"No," he said, "I can't buy them off that way."

He spoke softly, as if to himself, but Dr. Zerneke asked sharply:

"Buy who off?"

"The bad dreams—the pictures," he said. "The things that come into my mind." . . . A frightful vision had visited him as he held the pen poised over the check. It was like the one that had come to him at lunch, with Gilbert—only worse, this time. Its misty fringes still clung to his mind and afflicted him with horror.

The doctor seemed to understand. She reached out and put her hand for a moment on one of his

stooped, miserable shoulders. "I'm sorry," she said. "What do you want to do?"

"I—I don't know," he said.

That vision— No, of course nothing like that would ever really happen. But was he to be tormented with such pictures all his life? In every handcuffed youth being taken to prison—in every poster offering a reward for a young murderer—was he to seek for the features of his unknown son?

"If you have any practical alternative to offer—" the doctor was saying.

His mind was still grappling with the thought of a life haunted by such visions. . . . His wife would say, "Dearest, you're positively morbid about crime-news!" He would have legitimate sons. "Dad, don't you think I'm old enough to have a car of my own?" And then he would have to think about his other son, the one nobody knew about—a tramp, perhaps, freezing on the rods of a freight-train. He would be like a man haunted.

"Do you think your own family would care to adopt the child?" Dr. Zerneke asked. "Is that what you would like to do?"

"I hadn't thought of that!" he said. "Of course—that's what I'll do!"

"Well," said the doctor thoughtfully, "you can consult them about it, and let me know."

Some dim apprehension of the actualities of that proposal came to him, clouding his relief. "Yes," he said, "I'll have to put it up to them. . . ."

"Of course," said the doctor, "they may not take kindly to the idea."

"They'll—*have* to do it!" said Norman.

"We'll see," said the doctor. "But I hope there will not be too much delay in settling the matter, one way or another."

"I'll go back home to-night," said Norman.

"And do you think you'll be able to give me the decision within, say, two weeks?"

"Oh, yes," he said.

She rose. "I'll expect to see or hear from you in a fortnight, then."

"In two weeks from to-day," he said, "I shall come here to get my son," and he walked out like some one in a dream.

## CHAPTER XIII: En Route

THERE was no use in waiting for old Gilbert. He would take the next train to Vickley.

He packed, and left a message, and caught a train which would get him home at midnight.

The train had barely left the environs of Chicago when he realized abruptly the folly of his errand. What! Propose to his father and mother that they should adopt and bring up his illegitimate child! It was too preposterous.

He felt an impulse to get up and jump from the slowly moving train. He would go to Dr. Zerneke and . . . And what? Give her a check?

He sank back in his chair. The train slid more swiftly out past the little towns, gathered momentum, hurled itself on toward Vickley. The song of the wheels on the rails was a mocking one. It seemed to say, over and over, "You're in for it now! You're in for it now!"

He could get off at Aurora, of course.

No, he'd have to see it through, somehow.

Was it so preposterous? He wished he had asked Dr. Zerneke for some statistics about this situation! Was it often done? He smiled, after a fashion, at the thought of saying to his father: "Every year, in the United States, six hundred respectable families (or sixty, or whatever it might

be) take a son's illegitimate child to raise. You see, this has plenty of precedent." Yes, doubtless it did sometimes happen in the United States: but not in Vickley. Not with people like the Overbecks.

He simply couldn't involve his family in a thing like that.

(Well, nobody asked him to! Why didn't he get off at Aurora—go back and sign the check which let him off scot-free?)

The train stopped presently at Aurora. Here was his chance. He'd better take it.

But he was still in his chair when the train pulled out of Aurora.

He simply couldn't decide this thing by himself. It was too overwhelming—too full of lifelong consequences. It needed a wiser head than his own. And his father was the wisest man he knew.

He would tell his father. His father might know what to do.

He envisaged in imagination that interview with his father.

"Did you seduce this girl under promise of marriage?"

And "Was she a virgin?" Yes, that would be terribly important to his father. If she had been a virgin, if he had seduced her, if he had promised marriage, his father's stern sense of justice might prevail though the heavens fell. . . . But it wasn't a question of marrying Isabel. It was a question of what should become of her child.

There had been a time, many years ago, when Norman not merely admired and feared his father, but loved and trusted him. When he was in trouble he could come to his father, though in fear and trembling, and tell the truth. He wished he could be that little boy again.

"What is it, Son? Tell your father."

"I—I had a sweetheart at college, Father, and now she has a baby, and doesn't want to keep it, and I don't want it given away to strangers, and I don't know what to do!"

"Was she a good girl?"

"Yes, Father."

"Then you'd better marry her, Son. It will hurt us all, but you must do what is right."

"But she won't marry me, Father."

"Send her to me. I'll talk with her about it. She'll *have* to marry you, Son."

Norman smiled. It would be wonderful to believe again in his father's omnipotence.

Well, what would his father say to Isabel? He imagined that, in the same boyish mood.

"How old are you, Isabel?"

"Twenty-six, sir."

"You were a year older than Norman when this happened. You can have no cause for resentment against him such as would justify you in refusing to marry him."

"But I want to be a painter!"

"We cannot always have what we want. My son

wanted to be a lawyer. Now he can't be—and you must take your punishment along with him. I will buy a pants-pressing establishment for the two of you, down on Commerce Street. By faithfully pressing creases in the trousers of our best citizens for the rest of your life, you will expiate your sin. And now off to the preacher with you!"

"Yes, sir!" (Exit Isabel, crying.)

He frowned, and imagined it again, in a slightly more realistic vein.

"You seem to be a well-brought-up young woman. I really can't understand this at all."

"I'm afraid nothing I could say would make it any clearer to you, Mr. Overbeck."

"Well, we won't go into that. The fact is that you and Norman have brought a child into the world. I have told him that he must marry you."

"And I have told him that I won't marry him."

"Nonsense! Why not?"

"Because I am going to Paris to paint."

"You can paint just as well in Vickley. The landscapes here along the Mississippi are as beautiful as any in the world. I have traveled, and I know. I'm sure Norman would have no objection to your doing water-color sketches in your spare time."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do, Mr. Overbeck. I've already explained to your son how I feel about it. It's very good of you to trouble yourself in the matter, but quite unnecessary. My mind is fully made up." Very cool Isabel was, in this interview.



"And now, if you'll excuse me, I have another engagement."

No, it wouldn't be like that *at all*. His father had emotions—and so had Isabel. There would be a battle. He would almost crush, almost overwhelm her—but not quite. She would be defiant, stubborn to the last. It would be rather a magnificent spectacle, that struggle between them—between the world as it always had been and the world as it was perhaps coming to be—between the old dispensation and the new.

(Why was he so sure his father would want them to marry? He might take old Gilbert's practical and cynical view of the situation. . . . No, he wouldn't do that. He was a good man, in his stern way. And in that thought there was some obscure comfort for Norman.)

He rose restlessly and went into the smoking compartment.

In all his experience of smoking cars and smoking compartments, he had never heard there what was known as a "typical smoking-car story." But this time, as it chanced, one was being told. It was just finished as he entered, and there was a burst of laughter. He recognized the story from the final lines. It was the one about the young couple who had been caught in the storm while driving in the country, and had stayed overnight at a farmhouse. His entrance put a damper on the others, and they shifted self-consciously to the subject of automo-

biles. Norman sat down in a corner, lighted a cigarette, and picked up a discarded magazine that lay on the leather seat beside him. It was an obscure magazine devoted to the more humorous aspects of sex. Norman reflected that the aspects of sex with which he was now becoming personally acquainted rather took the humor out of stories about casual sexual encounters. He had once thought they were funny, too; but just now it seemed to him that these things were too serious to laugh about. Some time he might recover his sense of sexual humor, but just now it was at a low ebb.

The world, however, had not changed because of an incident in the life of Norman Overbeck. Sex continued to seem funny to other people. The three other men in the smoking-compartment, encouraged by his apparent absorption in his reading, verged closer to that delectable topic, and presently one of them began to tell another story. "If I had secretly committed a murder," thought Norman, "I suppose I would find them talking about murders!" For by a painful coincidence this story was the one about the eight girls in Scotland who had illegitimate children and all named the same boy as the father. The doctor's curiosity was aroused, and he went to see the boy to find out how it could happen. . . .

Norman, feeling a little sick, threw down his cigarette, dropped his magazine and went out. As he went, he heard, in bad Scotch dialect, the tag line, "Wull, ye see, doctor, Oi've a bicycle!" And the

robust laughter of the three followed him into the corridor. . . . Was he never going to be able to listen to a dirty story again with normal masculine gusto?

The porter came through the car. "First call for dinner!"

The man sitting across from him at the little table in the dining-car was a salesman. Norman roused himself and they talked about automobiles. If it had been anything else, he might have lost himself in the conversation for a few minutes at least. But one can talk about automobiles without having to think of what one is saying. . . .

He stopped in the smoking-compartment for a cigarette. The magazine devoted to funny stories about sex was gone. In its place was a copy of the *New Republic*. He turned the pages. At another time he would not have noticed it, but there staring him in the face was an article on "Unmarried Mothers." The illegitimacy rate for Scotland, he noted, was 66 per thousand births, for England and Wales 42, for France (before the war) 88, the United States 23.8. . . . He studied the tables guiltily. Isabel had found these statistics comforting, so she said. He did not find them so. "A considerable proportion of the mothers are girls in their teens, while what data is available indicates that a large majority of them are working in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, with an undue proportion in factory work and domestic service."

But there wasn't anything about girls who wanted to go to Paris and paint, and wouldn't marry the fathers of their children. . . .

"Contrary, however, to prevalent ideas on the subject, European statistics show that illegitimacy rates tend to increase rather than decrease with the spread of education; they are lower in cities than in rural districts; and comparisons of the poorest parts of London with certain well-to-do parts show the richer districts as having an illegitimacy rate of nearly six times the poorest districts."

Well, there was a grain of comfort in that. . . .

But why must he, now, find the subject of illegitimacy everywhere he turned?

Damn these coincidences!

He took one more glance at the article, and read: "In Austria, about a quarter of all births are illegitimate; in some rural districts nearly a half."

Yes—but why had *Isabel* had a baby? Perhaps simply because, after all, she was a girl. It seemed to be the sort of thing that quite generally happened to girls, in or out of marriage. Mere ignorance couldn't account for all those illegitimate babies! Girls must *want* to have babies, in spite of the frightful penalties that are attached to having them except in accordance with the rules. Nature laughs at the solemn rules of marriage, and the babies come at her bidding. Not accident, not carelessness, but some profound wish, deeper than their conscious fears, for this fulfillment of their natural destiny!

In Isabel, too? He had to believe that. The woman in her had wanted—not merely that hour of delirium in the woods—but motherhood. Yet her nature was divided against itself. Something else in her was in revolt against being a woman. She was running away from her fate. That was the truth. . . . And he, in this internal battle between woman and artist, was the victim, along with her child. The woman that was in Isabel had chosen him to be her child's father. The artist that was in Isabel was deserting them both with a brutal indifference. But here they were, father and child, made so at her deep wish, the wish she now repudiated. Nothing she might do could destroy the bond she had created between him and her child. She had given him a son. Let her run away to Paris, and forget. He couldn't forget. He was caught in a trap of Nature's. It was real. It was damnable. But it was true. He had a son. And what was he going to do about it?

He looked at his watch. Still an hour and a half from Vickley.

Would his father understand?

## CHAPTER XIV: Home-coming

HE decided to walk home from the station. A soft breeze tossed him its faint, acrid, earthy scents. The stars were hidden and revealed by the fleecy scud of clouds. The moon, dwindling to its last quarter, had just lifted itself above the hills. Back in those hills, among the trees, was his home. All was peaceful there. They didn't know the trouble he was bringing them. . . .

The moon had been large and low when he and Isabel had gone together into the wood, last year. What was there about the moon that made people think they had to make love? And afterward the moon sailed on serenely, not giving a damn, leaving them to worry about the consequences. Usually, though, it was the girl who did the worrying. . . .

If he were a girl—would his folks understand? Better, perhaps, than as it was now. They'd have to take the baby. . . .

He had passed the old brick building where he used to go to school as a boy. And here was the house where the Snyders had lived. He had not noticed the house for years. He had forgotten the mystery that it once contained for him. But now he remembered. The little boy playing about the Snyder yard was really (it was whispered on the way



home from school) not Sally Snyder's little brother but her own bastard child. Norman had occasionally caught a glimpse of Sally Snyder—a tall, pale, quiet girl. She never went anywhere, it was said. . . .

That secret hadn't been very well kept. And now Norman wondered how the little Snyder boy had got along in school. He himself had gone on to high school, ceasing to pass the house, and had forgotten the story. But had the other boys referred to Sally's son, behind his back, as a bastard? (Or to his face? . . .) Norman counted up the years. Sally's boy would be about eighteen now. Did he still live here? Did this dark house still shelter him and his tall, pale, silent sister-mother? Or had the family moved to some other town, where the story wasn't known?

That was one good thing about being poor. Poverty gave you, in a new town, a kindly obscurity. . . . But it wouldn't be any use for the Overbecks to move away. (Or so it seemed to Norman, accustomed as he was to being a member of one of the chief families of Vickley.) They would have to stay and face what they would call their shame. . . .

He turned the corner. There was a light in his father's study. Was his father waiting up for him? That would not be unlikely, if his father had known he was coming to-night. Anyway, it would be a good chance to tell his father everything. The sooner the better.



He ran up the steps and went in. His father's voice from the study asked in surprise and disapproval: "Who's that?"

So he wasn't expected. But who of the family could be out at this hour? "Early to bed" was a rule strictly enforced in the Overbeck household. "It's me," he answered, and went into the study, where his father was sitting at a table, somewhat ostentatiously waiting. He sat stiffly in his chair, with an upright, severe bearing. People spoke with admiration of the old man's soldierly carriage. Well, he had been a soldier, back in the years before Norman was born, in the Spanish war. But anybody else would have forgotten that. Not that that had anything to do with it. He must always have been a martinet—born with discipline in his blood. Here he was, the General, seeing that the little Overbeck army got safely to bed.

"Oh," said his father, "it's you. I am waiting up for Doris."

Doris? Oh, yes, of course. This was the night of the spring "hop" of her high-school sorority. She had a new frock for the occasion. She had brought it in to show him the other day while he was packing to go to Chicago. . . .

"There she is now," said his father, as a car stopped noisily at the curb.

Doris! He hadn't taken her into his calculations at all. . . . No, he had simply not thought of her—and his baby here in the house. Would they talk

at school about her being the aunt of a ——? Or (Good God!) would they think it was really *hers*? His fists clenched, and his forehead was suddenly wet with perspiration. . . .

Out on the porch Doris and her boy friend were giggling. . . .

No—that was absurd. But just the same she would be involved in the scandal. It would poison her friendships, humiliate and hurt her. It might spoil her whole life. Oh, it was altogether out of the question. He couldn't inflict that on her. . . .

"Good night, Peter!"

"Good night, Doris!"

Young voices. . . .

The front door opened and shut, and Doris came straight to the lighted room, saying in exasperated protest: "I *do* wish, Father, you wouldn't wait up for me! I can—"

She paused in the doorway, seeing her brother. "Oh, *you're* home!" she cried. Then she walked in, with a little self-conscious swagger. She was showing herself off in her new frock to her big brother.

"You look," he said, "like a million dollars! How was the dance?"

"I had a swell time," she answered.

There was a time when Mr. Overbeck would have reproved any child of his for using such vulgar expressions. But not even J. J. Overbeck could sweep back the rising tide. All he said was: "Doris, go up to bed. It's nearly one o'clock."

"Oh, all rightie!" she replied, and swaggered out.

"How did you come out with the supreme court?" asked Norman.

"I think my arguments may have impressed them," his father admitted. And then he asked: "How did you come to go to Chicago so suddenly?"

Now, if ever, was the time to confess. But what was the use?

And so Norman repeated what he had already told Medway to tell his father: "Old Gilbert got it into his head that I could help him—seeing some people in a will case. I didn't think I'd really be of much use, but he insisted on my going along."

His father nodded. "That's all right," he said. "It won't do you any harm to work with Gilbert Rand. There's a good deal you can learn from him."

Norman's chance had passed. . . .

"I'll lock up," said his father.

"Good night," said Norman.

"Good night."

Upstairs, a door opened as he passed, and a whisper called him. "Norman!"

It was his sister Lucinda, in wrapper and archaic curl-papers. He paused.

"I just wanted to ask you—did you look at my puppy for me?"

"Your puppy?" said Norman, wrenching his mind loose from his own thoughts.

"Yes—you know you promised to go and look at

him yesterday—the one with the black spot over his left eye. And I wasn't here when you came home to pack, so I didn't know whether you had or not."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was so rushed I couldn't get around to Schwartz's. I'll go to-morrow if you want me to."

"Oh, I wish you would, Norman! I just can't decide by myself!"

How, he asked himself, as he went into his room, could he bring the truth into such a world as this? It couldn't be done!

But what was he going to do?

He felt suddenly very tired—too tired to think.  
. . . He would decide to-morrow.

## CHAPTER XV: Family Breakfast

**A**T eight o'clock a bell sounded through the Overbeck house, to tell everybody to get up. At eight-thirty it would sound again, telling them to come to breakfast.

It had been so as long as Norman could remember—except that on week-days the bell sounded an hour earlier. And that bell, like the voice of J. J. Overbeck himself, had always been obeyed. But this morning, though the bell struck into his sleeping consciousness, he did not want to wake up. He wanted to hold fast to the dream he was dreaming. . . . Something about being off on a ship, alone. . . .

Ten minutes later his mother shook him gently by the shoulder, saying: "Norman, you'd better get up. It's eight-forty. And you know how Father feels about having us all at the breakfast table."

"All—right!" he said reluctantly, opening his eyes.

He watched her go out of the room—the little, sensible, practical wife of the great J. J. Overbeck. . . .

What was that dream? It had vanished completely.

He sprang out of bed. And then he remembered

yesterday—Isabel—the baby—Dr. Zerneke—his errand here. It seemed unreal.

He shaved hurriedly, so as not to be late to breakfast.

Doris came down a little late, sleepy and petulant. "I don't see why I can't be allowed to have my sleep out when I'm at a party the night before," she said, as she dug her spoon into her grapefruit. "Everybody else sleeps on Sunday morning!"

"You should have thought of that last night," said Lucinda vindictively.

"You know," said her mother placatingly, "that Father likes us all to be at the breakfast table with him."

"Yes, I know," said Doris, "but I don't see the sense of it. It's a darn silly rule, if you ask me."

They all waited for J. J. Overbeck's quiet thunders and lightnings to descend upon the rebel.

"If that's the effect that late hours have on your temper," said her father gravely, "I think perhaps this had better be the last of them, until you are old enough to have learned some self-control."

Doris struggled with her tears for a moment, and then jumped up and ran crying from the room.

Norman looked down at his plate, ashamed. What a home! . . .

It was always like this—meaningless tyrannies, with which they all made such terms as they could. Their mother didn't seem to notice it. Lucinda had been crushed by it into what she was. He himself

had learned how to get along with his father. Doris was stubborn, but she would have to learn. . . . And he had taken it all for granted.

He had known that other homes were not like this. But as a boy he had accepted it as one accepts the climate. Away at college, he had preferred to forget it. But coming back to Vickley again, he had begun to take it for granted once more.

His way of getting along with his father was to acquiesce publicly in his authority, but to retain a secret independence of opinion. It occurred to him now that this was rather cowardly. Even Doris's undignified outbreaks were more honest. He had always sympathized with her in silence. Now he wanted to break that pattern and speak up in her defense. And so he said abruptly in the silence that followed his sister's departure from the room:

"I think Isabel is quite right."

He realized the slip of his tongue as they stared at him.

"Who's Isabel?" asked Lucinda.

He flushed. "I meant Doris. She should be allowed to sleep after a late party. Especially on Sunday."

"Who is Isabel?" Lucinda repeated.

His defiance, such as it was, had been completely spoiled by that silly slip of the tongue. They would all be wondering who Isabel was. . . .

He ignored Lucinda's question and spoke sharply, forgetting his accustomed dignity:



"Father has no right to punish her that way—for a mere trifle!"

His father was surprised, and for a moment or two said nothing at all. At last he remarked quietly:

"Late hours don't seem to agree with you, either, Norman."

Lucinda's lips were framing the question: "Who—?"

"Well," Norman demanded of his father beligerently, "are you going to send *me* to bed at ten o'clock?"

"Norman!" said his mother in sensible, practical disapproval of such nonsense.

"If you are going to behave like a child," said his father, "I ought to send you from the table like one."

"I'd prefer to go," said Norman. He rose and marched out of the room—feeling as though he were ten years old.

In the hall he saw Doris coming downstairs. He waited for her.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm going back and apologize," she said lightly. "It's the only thing to do."

Their mother's practical voice floated out from the breakfast room.

"Norman, if you're going out, take your overcoat."

"Where are you running off to?" asked Doris.

She was helping him on with his overcoat. "To see Madge, I suppose!"

"Madge? Oh—why—yes."

He had managed to forget Madge. . . .

"Wait a moment," said Doris. "I'll bring you a fresh handkerchief." She snatched the old one out of his breast pocket, ran up the stairs, came back and tucked the clean one in. "There!" she said.

Outside, he glanced over next door at the new frame building—the home his father was building for him and Madge—almost finished. . . . That was just like his father—to put them next door, where he could run their affairs for them, as if they were children.

## CHAPTER XVI: Aubade

**M**ADGE! Yes, he had to go to see her. But—could he tell her? What was the use! He couldn't bring his son to Vickley. He realized that now. . . . Perhaps he ought to be sensible about the thing.

He wished Hal were here. Hal, at Cambridge, was the first real friend he had ever had since childhood. Hal wouldn't argue with him, wouldn't tell him what he ought to do. Hal would listen to him. That was what he needed. Maybe if he could talk to somebody—somebody who didn't represent Vickley—he would feel better.

At any rate, there was no sense in telling Madge. Old Gilbert had been quite right about that. . . . He would have to act a part.

He would just behave as if nothing had happened.

As Gilbert had said, she would be thinking about other things. . . . She would never need to know. . . .

His life stretched out in front of him—a long vista of bridge-parties, as it seemed at this moment, with Madge as a handsome young matron presiding over them. He would live all his life with that pretty stranger—for so now she seemed. She would

be called his wife. Perhaps people would speak approvingly of their happy marriage. . . .

Here he was, already, at the Ferris house.

He hadn't thought what he was going to say.

Just behave naturally—that was it.

He gave the bell his customary long ring followed abruptly by two short ones—the signal that Madge said sounded like “O-ver-beck!”

No one came immediately, and he had to fight an impulse to go away. He rang again, and waited.

A sound of feet running down the stairs quickly. Madge! He felt a sick qualm in his stomach. Madge calling to the maid who came tardily hurrying from the back: “I’ll answer the bell, Katie!”

She opened the door. “Hello, Toodles!” she said. In the hall she flung herself into his arms. . . . It seemed queer to be so passionately kissing a stranger. . . .

“Let little me help him off with his overcoat,” she said.

She led him into the “den” off the hall. It was a place of memories of their courtship. But these memories seemed curiously alien to him now. Was it he that had read poetry to her, sitting on that sofa? Was it he who had asked her, one winter night, to be his wife?

“She’s not dressed,” she said, drawing her flowery negligée about her, and bending her bobbed golden head toward him. “Her hair’s not dry!

When your imperious ring came, she was just finishing her bath!"

These childish mannerisms of speech had once enchanted him.

"When did the old bum get home?" she demanded, drawing him down on the couch beside her.

"Last night—late," he said.

"How late?"

"My train got in at midnight."

"That's not late. She was waiting for you—hoping you'd be back. She couldn't get to sleep, thinking of you. And she had a queer dream. . . ."

He asked, with a pang of superstitious dread: "A dream—about me?"

"Never mind," she said. "She never tells her dreams before breakfast." And then: "Why doesn't he act as if he were glad to see me?"

He kissed her again.

"What's the matter, Norman?" she asked abruptly, drawing away from him. "Has anything happened?"

"Yes," he said. (Why did he say that?)

"What is it, dear?" she asked anxiously.

He must not tell her. . . . And he spoke at random, saying the first thing that came into his mind—just to be saying something: "I looked at our house. . . ."

"Yes, Norman?"

"It's much too close to my father's. . . ."

"I've known that all along," she said quietly.

"Did you?" That little remark of hers astonished him infinitely. He realized that he had never known this girl at all. "I didn't," he said, "until this morning."

"What happened this morning? Have you been quarreling with your family?"

"Yes," he said. "How did you know?"

"What were you quarreling about?" she asked.

"Why—nothing, really. About getting up on Sunday." He laughed nervously. "You'd have to get up at eight on Sunday—if you lived there!"

"You think I'd let your family run *me*?"

"I don't know how you'd help yourself." (But why were they talking about that house?)

"Trust me!" she answered. "Norman—we haven't talked about it: but you and I are going to live our own lives, when we are married. We can live anywhere we like."

He didn't say anything.

"Have they been criticizing me?" she demanded.

"Who?"

"Well—your sister Lucinda."

"Oh, no—of course not!" he said. But the stream of memory began to flow back into its old channels. And he could remember that there had been a time, months ago, when Lucinda had been spiteful about Madge. She had called her "frivolous" and "giddy." Nor, what was somewhat more important, had Madge's Aunt Julia approved at all

of him. She had thought of him, for some reason, as irresponsible. He and Madge had enjoyed all the sensations of being misunderstood, of defying their families, of being leagued together in love and faith against a hostile world. . . . And then the criticisms had changed to blessings. Within a few months, all their world was anxious to get them married and settled down. But to Madge, it would seem, their romantic defiance of the world was still real. That was the only thing she could imagine as shadowing their happiness—the opinion of his family.

“Then what’s the matter?” she was asking.

He couldn’t bring realities into that doll-world of hers. . . . “Nothing,” he answered—too evasively.

“I know there is,” she insisted.

It would be like hurting a child. . . . But he ought to give her some warning. . . .

“Madge,” he said, “I may have to give up my position in my father’s office—and go away—” He stopped. He hadn’t intended to say that. . . .

“Norman!”

The trouble was that he kept forgetting his purpose. A purpose implies a conviction, and a stable sense of realities. His world fluctuated and changed about him from moment to moment. . . .

This puzzled, incredulous girl at his side—she wasn’t a child, but a woman. It was he who felt like a child.

“I’m in trouble, Madge,” he said.



Her arms were around him. "What is it, Norman?" she asked quietly.

He wanted terribly to tell her. There was some reason why he shouldn't—but he couldn't remember exactly what it was.

"I never told you," he said, "about a girl I knew at Cambridge. We were—sweethearts. And—I didn't know until the other day—when she sent for me—in Chicago—there's a baby."

"You mean—yours?" Her voice was very cool, remote, far away. He didn't look at her. But he was aware that her arms had slipped away from him, that her body no longer touched his.

"Yes, mine," he said.

She rose, slowly. "I'm glad you told me," she said.

He didn't look at her face, but he saw her body convulsed by a shiver, and her hands were fumbling together. Then a ring dropped to the floor.

He stooped to pick it up, and rose. Now he remembered the reason why he must not tell her. She wouldn't want to marry him—of course.

"You're free now," she said, "to go to her."

They were struck silent in their tableau by a sense of people coming. The maid. And footsteps descending the stair. That would be Aunt Julia.

But the maid came first.

"Mr. Overbeck is wanted on the telephone."

"Me?"

"It's your sister, Miss Lucinda, Mr. Overbeck. It's something about a dog."

It was too absurd. . . . "Yes—please ask her to wait one moment." He would have to greet Madge's aunt.

The maid went away. . . .

Then Aunt Julia.

"Good morning, Norman." She offered her cheek to be kissed. "You'd better go and put some clothes on, Madge. I'll entertain Norman while you dress. You'll stay to breakfast, Norman."

Madge went out, and slowly up the stairs. . . . He hadn't had a chance to explain anything to her. Why did Aunt Julia have to interrupt them just now? He smouldered with helpless anger.

"When did you get back from Chicago?" Aunt Julia asked affably, seating herself on the sofa.

"Last night." Damn this silly woman!

"Don't walk up and down the room, Norman. Sit down. And tell me what's the matter."

Oh, he'd have to tell her something.

"Madge," he said, "has just broken our engagement." And as he spoke he seemed to realize for the first time what he had done. Of course she wouldn't marry him. He had smashed everything. . . .

"What!" said Aunt Julia, in amused incredulity. "No, not really? You mustn't take these lovers' quarrels too seriously, Norman."

"Lovers' quarrels! I wish that were all!" he said bitterly.

"Oh, is it so bad as all that, really?"

"Yes, Mrs. Ferris."

Her face took on an expression of sympathy, and after a moment's thought she said reassuringly:

"I know, Madge is a very high-spirited girl. But it's a little late in the day to change her mind. If you'll only tell me what the trouble is, I'll be glad to talk with her. An older woman, you know, Norman, has a more reasonable point of view. If it's really so serious, it must be a question of—well, another girl. Have you been philandering, Norman?"

He saw what she was thinking, and reluctantly answered:

"No—not exactly."

"Not exactly? But she thinks so! I see. Has it anything to do with your Chicago trip?"

"Yes—in a way," he said evasively.

"Don't you want to tell me about it, Norman? I'm sure it's nothing that can't be smoothed out. I know Madge will be reasonable when she's had a chance to think things over."

Norman felt a sudden unreasonable anger. She was so comfortable—so sure that nothing could go seriously wrong in her little world. He wanted to shatter that complacency of hers. . . .

But it was not necessary for him to speak. At that moment they both heard a sound of sobbing upstairs. It was like no woman's crying that he had

ever heard. It had a strange note of animal pain in it. . . . Then silence. . . . Norman felt himself transfixed by pity as by a spear thrust through his body. He realized what he had done to Madge. . . . Aunt Julia rose, startled.

The maid returned to say: "Miss Lucinda is still on the wire, Mr. Overbeck."

"Oh, yes. Excuse me." What a nightmare!

Lucinda's voice. "Oh, Norman, Mr. Schwartz called up, and said that somebody else wants to buy that puppy. He wants to know whether I want it. Won't you go and look at it right away, and tell me what you think? It's the one with the black spot over his left eye!"

"All right. I'll go."

When he came back, the room was empty. Aunt Julia had gone upstairs to comfort Madge. He listened, and he heard the sound of voices. . . .

*Why* had he done it? But it was too late to ask that. . . .

Anyway, he *had* done it. . . .

It was all over. . . .

He stood there irresolutely for a moment, then took his things from the hall, and went quietly out of the house.

Madge had been a good sport about it. But it was a little too much like committing murder.

And *now* to face the folks at home. . . .

## CHAPTER XVII: Flight

**B**UT he did not go home. He walked down town.

He had keys to the Overbeck building. He would go there and think.

Why had he told Madge? There wasn't any sense to it. Yes, why? . . .

But that wasn't the question, either. The question was what to do now—now that he had told Madge. . . .

He walked up and down in the outer office, trying to think. It was no use. His mind wouldn't work.

He lay down on one of the leather-upholstered benches, exhausted, and fell asleep.

When he woke up it was dark. He looked at his watch. Ten o'clock. Had he slept all day?

He had certainly made a frightful mess of things. . . . He reached for a cigarette.

When he had smoked all his cigarettes, he went out for more. He had not been able to make any decisions at all.

On an impulse, he stepped into the telephone booth at the cigar store, and called up Madge's house. He was going to ask how she was. But when he heard her voice answering him, he lost his nerve. What could he say to her?

"Sorry," he muttered, and hung up the receiver.

After a moment's thought, he reached for his pocketbook. It wasn't there, and he remembered that he had left it in the bureau in his room.

He came out of the booth, and went up to the counter, taking out his check-book. "Jack," he said, "how's your cash to-night? Can you let me have twenty-five dollars?"

"Fifty, if you like, Mr. Overbeck," said Jack.

"All right—I could use fifty. Or a hundred. Could you let me have a hundred?"

"I'll see, Mr. Overbeck."

He looked in the cash-register, and took some bills from his pocket. "I'm afraid I haven't got a hundred here. I could let you have seventy. Or, if you don't mind taking some silver, I could give you—let's see—eighty. Eighty-five. Would that do?"

"That will be fine."

Norman wrote out a check, pushed it across the counter, and stuffed the money in his pocket. "Do you happen to know what time the St. Louis train leaves?"

Jack thought there was just about time to make it.





# BOOK TWO

In Exile



## CHAPTER I: The Prodigal

ON a certain Saturday afternoon, Norman Overbeck called up Dr. Zerneke's office, asking if he might see her. The girl answered without hesitation, "Come right over, please!"

When he arrived, the girl gazed at him curiously. He looked quite the same as she remembered him, with his little stick, his soft hat, his light wavy hair, his polite manner—and his courteous voice, by now familiar to her from hearing it daily over the telephone. It had been her duty during the last two weeks to send a telegram to Gilbert Rand in Vickley, saying, "Telephoned to-day as usual." For this young man had called up every day, refusing to give any name, and imperiously demanding news of the health of Isabel Drury's baby. At first she had argued with him about it; but when she had referred the matter to Dr. Zerneke, the doctor had smiled and said: "It's all right. Tell him. He happens to be the baby's father." This week he had shown some anxiety when he heard that the baby had been sent to a "boarding home." She had assured him that there was nothing to worry about. . . .

The waiting-room to-day was full of women patients, but Norman was ushered immediately into the doctor's office.

Norman felt rather like a fool—and at the same

time quite pleased with himself. Dr. Zerneke, he felt, if anybody, would understand. At any rate, he hoped she would! . . .

"Well!" said Dr. Zerneke, shaking hands with him. "What have you been doing, these last two weeks?"

"I—why—I've been here in Chicago, as a matter of fact," he said. "Has anybody been looking for me?"

"Everybody has been looking for you," said Dr. Zerneke. "Your friend Gilbert Rand is here in town looking for you right now. And I've been bombarded with telegrams about you. The police would have been looking for you, if you hadn't turned up pretty quick. What do you mean by disappearing from the world like that?"

"I'm sorry," said Norman. "Were my family worried?"

"Of course they were worried. They didn't know whether you were alive or dead."

"But I sent a letter—"

"So I heard. And it seems to have sounded to your family as if you were intending to commit suicide."

"Good Lord!" He had left Vickley out of his calculations. In fact, he had managed to keep from thinking very much of the folks at home during these two weeks. It was just like them to act as though he were a runaway child! Why couldn't they let him alone for once?

"But what have you been up to, all this time?"

"Why, I've been getting a job." He masked his secret pride with an air of casualness.

"A job here in Chicago?"

"Yes."

"Really!"

"Yes. In an advertising office. Wilkins and Freeman."

"So that's what you've been doing!" She looked at him curiously.

"Well—as a matter of fact that only took me a week. But I wanted to see whether I could hold the job before I said anything to any one about it. And you gave me two weeks, you know."

That was by way of reminding her of her promise. He had told her he would be back in two weeks. He hadn't known, then, what it would mean to come back—over what débris of a wrecked career he would have to clamber. . . . But here he was.

"The two weeks are up to-day," he added.

Dr. Zerneke said reflectively: "As I remember, I gave you two weeks to find out if your family would take the baby."

"Well, you see—I made rather a mess of that," he confessed.

"I was afraid you might find it difficult to persuade them."

"To tell you the truth, I didn't really try. I saw it would be no use. I decided that I'd have to take care of the baby myself."

"You?"

"Certainly. That's why I came here and got a job."

He took out a cigarette, tapped it, and put it back in the case. . . .

"But you must realize," said Dr. Zerneke, "that this is an entirely new proposal. Last week, it was a question of having the child adopted by a responsible family. Now you make it a question of turning the child over to an irresponsible young man of very uncertain prospects."

"I don't think my prospects are so bad, really, Dr. Zerneke," he protested.

"Would you mind telling me—it's a question you oblige me to ask—what you are now making, Mr. Overbeck, at your new job?"

"I'm starting in at thirty dollars a week. I know that's not very much. But it's merely while I'm on trial. As soon as I show that I can do the work, I'll get a raise to fifty or sixty. And so on. If I'm any good at all, I'll be getting eighty-five or ninety in the course of the year. And the rest is up to me. —I'm repeating what my boss told me when I got the job. And, if you can take my word for it, I have some real ability at this kind of work. I ought to be getting my raise within a month or so."

"It's not entirely a question of money," said Dr. Zerneke. "It's partly a matter of character."

He hadn't expected to have to argue about it

like this. But he would defend himself if he had to. . . .

"Yes—I know you called me irresponsible. Because I changed my job, I suppose. But you make it sound as if I were a drunkard or a thief. Haven't I a right to stop being a lawyer if I want to?"

"Look at the thing impersonally for a moment, Mr. Overbeck. Do you really think it is a recommendation of a young man's character and stability, that he disappears from home for two weeks, allows his family to think him dead—"

"But I didn't know they were going to think any such idiotic thing."

"Well, why did you do it? That's what I don't understand."

"Because it was the only way I could be free to— to go ahead with this. I *had* to cut loose from my family."

"You wish to acknowledge the child as your son?"

"I do, certainly."

"And make him your heir?"

"Yes, of course."

"I should think you could do that without so much melodrama, Mr. Overbeck. You do not need to have left home for that, surely. Your family would have had to reconcile themselves to the fact. If they refused to do so, that would be another matter."

"But—that isn't all. I want to have my son with me."

"You are hardly in a position to take care of him,



are you? You have no home at present—I take it that on thirty dollars a week you are living in a furnished room. And you have no one to look after the baby—you're not married,—and you can scarcely afford to set up an establishment with a housekeeper and nurse. We don't turn babies over to bachelors, Mr. Overbeck."

"Is that a rule, Dr. Zerneke? Even when the bachelor happens to be the baby's father?"

"I admit that precisely such a situation has never come up before in my experience. But there's another thing—it wouldn't be fair to the child to pitch him into the middle of a family row. A baby is a baby, Mr. Overbeck. He needs regular meals and sleep, in an atmosphere of peace and affection. He is getting that now. We've put him in a boarding home, as it's called—a private family."

"Yes, so I heard. What's—become of Isabel?"

"She has left town."

"Oh!"

He wouldn't let himself think about Isabel. . . . That was all over. . . .

With an effort he put his attention on what Dr. Zerneke was saying:

"If you want to act for the best interests of your child, Mr. Overbeck, you will go back home and straighten things out with your family. And then you will make a will acknowledging the child as your son and naming him as your heir. There is no reason why he should not inherit your share of your

father's estate some day. That is why I suggest that you make up with your family—so that you, and consequently your child, will not be disinherited. Now that you have a child, you must think of such things, and behave sensibly. This is not a matter for histrionics—defiance of your family, and all that." She paused.

"Yes, I can see your point of view," said Norman doubtfully.

"In the meantime—I assure you that the Society is glad enough to turn over its financial responsibilities—you can pay for the child's care. You will be able to see him whenever you like. And later, when you marry, your wife will be prepared to take the child into your home. I believe that I have heard something about your being engaged?"

"Yes, but that's off. I told her about the baby, and she broke the engagement."

"No doubt it would be a shock to a girl, coming without warning. Well, if she won't marry you, some other girl will. Then you can have your child to bring up."

"Not until then?"

"Certainly not now. What would you do with a four-weeks-old baby, Mr. Overbeck?"

Norman realized with a shock of surprise that the part of his mind which had been taking some satisfaction in the thought of having a son at his side, was picturing this son sometimes as a boy of eighteen and sometimes as a boy of five. His

fantasies had all concerned the future, not the present. . . .

"I—I hadn't worked all that out," he said.

"I thought not. Tell me, Mr. Overbeck—if you saw a roomful of babies, could you pick out your own child?"

Norman reflected. "I think so," he said. "He has light hair, like mine, and a queer-shaped head."

Dr. Zerneke smiled. "Would you like to see him again?"

"Yes. I would."

"If I can feel safe that you're not going to do something idiotic, I'll let you see him."

"What do you mean, idiotic?"

"Such as trying to kidnap him. . . ."

"Oh, but really—you don't think I'm as crazy as all that!"

"No, I don't. That's why I'm going to let you see him. And as soon as the situation clears up satisfactorily, as I trust it will, we can take the next step."

"I ought to tell you, Dr. Zerneke, that I have no intention of trying to make up with my family," said Norman firmly.

"Well, perhaps they will do the making up," said Dr. Zerneke easily. "And in the meantime the child can stay with Mrs. Czermak. I'll give you a note to her."

She took pen and paper, and wrote. Looking up, she said: "You'll find her a very capable foster-

mother. She has an interesting story that I'll tell you some time. This is the third baby she's taken care of for me."

"What," asked Norman, "happened to the others?" His tone was anxious. He had heard of "baby-farms." . . .

Dr. Zerneke smiled. "They came back to their mothers fat and rosy. You needn't worry about what happens to babies in Mrs. Czermak's care."

She handed him the note.

"And by the way," she said, "we must make up a story for you."

"A story for me?"

"To account for the baby. You don't want everybody in Chicago to know the peculiar state of your affairs, do you?"

"No. I've had enough of trying to explain it in Vickley."

"Now when a girl has a fatherless baby, we always advise a wedding ring and a dead husband to simplify matters. But I don't think you ought to be a widower, Mr. Overbeck." She paused thoughtfully. "A widower with a baby is the natural prey of womankind. You'll have a hard enough time as it is. You ought to have a wife, even though an absent one, to scare them off. Now how should we account for her absence? She might be ill—but then people would be sympathetic and inquiring. Can you think of a good story—simple, convincing, and not too interesting?"

"It does seem a rather difficult problem, doesn't it?" said Norman, trying hard to think.

"T.B. is the only thing I can think of."

"T.B.?"

"Yes. Your wife has been ordered to Colorado for the sake of her health. She's in a sanitarium—you can be vague about that: or you can say Dr. Rublee's sanitarium—there isn't any such place, but there might be. She'll have to stay there six months or a year. Yes, I think that will do. You understand just why I advise this story, don't you? It's simply to keep you from being married off to the first unattached woman you come across."

"Do you really think there's any great likelihood of any one being willing to marry me?"

"My dear man, you don't know what you're up against. Well, you can start in practicing your story on Mrs. Czermak, if you like. I told her the mother was ill. You can elaborate it. She'll be glad enough of the prospect of keeping the baby longer."

The telephone rang, and Dr. Zerneke turned to answer.

"Yes, connect him, please. . . . Mr. Rand? . . . Yes, indeed—your young friend is right here. I'll let you speak to him."

She handed the telephone to Norman.

"Hello, Gilbert."

"Good God, is it really you, Norman?"

"It's all right, Gilbert. Where are you?"

"At the Annex. What the devil have you been doing?"

"I'll tell you all about it. I'll be with you in about an hour. . . . Keep your shirt on. Good-by!"

He turned to Dr. Zerneke. "You don't quite realize what I'm in for," he said.

Dr. Zerneke smiled. "I don't know your family," she said, "but I've been in communication with your friend Mr. Rand, and you'll find him quite reasonable, I think."

"Just the same, I want to make my first visit to—my son. Before I see any one from Vickley."

"If that will make you feel better, go ahead," said Dr. Zerneke.

She dismissed him with a warm hand-shake.

## CHAPTER II: A Man Has Some Rights

MRS. CZERMAK'S address was on the North side, not far away. . . . He really couldn't afford a taxi. But this was a special occasion—and Gilbert was waiting. He hailed one.

One in a row of dingy three-story brick houses. He rang the bell. A young woman came to the door.

"I want to see Mrs. Czermak."

"I'm Mrs. Czermak. Did you want a room?"

She was younger than he had expected Mrs. Czermak to be—not a responsible-looking middle-aged matron, but a girl in her middle twenties—not at all what he had pictured as a child's nurse. . . . And her speech did not have the foreign accent that her name suggested.

"No—I—here's a letter from Dr. Zerneke," he said.

She stood there, leaving him waiting on the doorstep, while she opened and read it. Then she looked up quickly.

"Oh—so you're my baby's father?" and she opened the door wider to admit him. "Do you want to see him now? He's asleep. You can look at him, though."

"I'd like to," said Norman.

She led him upstairs, through a bedroom, very



clean and orderly, into a small room which was the nursery. There was the crib. They went up to it, and she drew back a coverlet.

Norman felt no particular emotion at the sight of the sleeping child. He wondered why. He was moving heaven and earth to have that child for his own. He had broken Madge's heart. It would make his family terribly unhappy. He had thrown away a career. And here was what it was all about—a baby with soft fair hair, and a queer-shaped head. No—the head wasn't so queer-shaped to-day. And the face was pinker. . . . He was a little disappointed at his lack of any deep feeling. . . .

The baby stirred in its sleep, and flung up a tiny fist.

Mrs. Czermak put back the coverlet, and Norman turned away. As they went back into the larger room, the picture of that small fist lingered in his mind.

He realized that Mrs. Czermak was expecting him to say something. He felt embarrassed—as if it were somebody else's baby he were being called upon to praise.

"It's awfully little, isn't it!" he said awkwardly.

"He's a fine baby!" said Mrs. Czermak defensively.

Norman was conscious of having said "it" instead of "he." Was she offended by that? Did she think he didn't appreciate the baby?

"If you come just before six, you can see him

awake," she said. "That's his feeding time. Or on Sundays you could come at a little before two."

Well, that was all. What had he expected? He had come to see his son. And he had seen him. Now he would go.

Gilbert was waiting for him. . . .

Somehow, he had expected something more—something to fortify him against Gilbert's reproaches—Gilbert's news of the havoc he had left behind him in Vickley. He had run away from Vickley. He hadn't permitted himself to think about what he had done to Madge—to his family. He'd hear about it all. And Gilbert would have some new, slick, plausible scheme.

"Sundays at two, you say?" he asked.

"Yes. That's when he gets his bottle. You might come a little before then—fifteen minutes before."

He'd never get acquainted with his son, at that rate. . . . It was more of a job than he had realized. First he had to get reconciled to his family—and then, apparently, get married! Good Lord! And meanwhile the baby would stay here. . . .

As he started to leave, an idea came brilliantly. Yes, why not? He turned to Mrs. Czermak.

"You say you have rooms for rent here?"

She hesitated, and then answered reluctantly:

"Sometimes."

He vaguely sensed some opposition to his plan. But he asked in a determined way:

"Have you any vacant now?"

Again she hesitated. "Not any suitable for two."

"I don't want a room for two. I want a room for one." He had the feeling of putting something over on Dr. Zerneke. Wait until he was married, to be with the baby? He would show her!

"Oh!" said Mrs. Czermak. "Well, I have a hall bedroom on the next floor."

"May I see it?"

"Is it for yourself or your wife?" asked Mrs. Czermak.

He remembered abruptly what Dr. Zerneke had told him to say.

"My wife has been ordered to Colorado for her health. She started to-day."

"Oh—and without the baby!"

"It will be quite out of the question for her to have the baby with her for another six months—possibly more," said Norman solemnly. "She's going to Dr. Rublee's sanitarium."

"Where is that—in Denver?"

"Yes," he said. He was anxious to get off a subject on which further questions would be embarrassing. "May I see the room?"

Her manner, which had become hostile for a minute or two, had changed to friendliness again. "Now that I come to think of it," she said, "there's the large front room downstairs. It was promised, but the people haven't come. I'll show it to you." She took him there.

He looked around. It was much larger, lighter, cleaner, than the one he had been living in.

"How much is it?" he asked.

She thought a moment. "We could let you have it for eight dollars, I guess."

Remarkably cheap! He had been paying eight for the hole he had been living in.

"I'll take it," he said.

Yes, if a baby couldn't live with a bachelor father, there was nothing to keep a bachelor father from coming to live with his baby! Norman smiled, with a sense of triumphing over a hostile universe.

Then he looked about the room again, with a practical glance. He went to the center-table. It was rickety under his touch, like the one upon which during his evenings for two weeks he had been computing and recomputing the statistics of illegitimate parenthood—a peculiar consolation which he had learned from Isabel. With the figures he had found at the Crerar library, and the further assistance of the population tables in the World Almanac, all sorts of interesting things could be worked out. . . .

"Could I have a small, solid table to write on? An unpainted kitchen table would do."

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Czermak. "When do you want to move in?"

"I'll move to-night." There wasn't, as a matter of fact, anything to move, except his overcoat and his alarm clock. And the two weeks for which he

had paid in advance were about up. He might as well make the change without delay, and get settled. He took out some bills.

"By the way," he said, "how much has Dr. Zerneke been paying you for taking care of the baby?"

"Ten dollars a week. With Grade A milk, and clothes, it comes to about twelve dollars, not counting extras."

Norman calculated silently. Twelve dollars for the baby; eight for his room; nine, say, for his meals; a dollar for laundry; that was exactly thirty dollars, and left him nothing for carfare or cigarettes. But he would manage somehow—and it would be only a few weeks until he got a raise.

"I'll take care of that from now on," he said.

"Suppose I pay a week in advance for the room, and a week for the baby," he said. "Will that be all right?"

He handed her the money.

She looked at it. "There's supposed to be a deposit for the keys," she said, "but we won't bother about that."

"Why not?" he said, and offered her another dollar.

"No," she shook her head. "You'll need every dollar you can save. With a sick wife in Colorado."

He somewhat guiltily put the dollar back in his pocket.

"I'll get you your keys," she said, turning to go.

"Never mind," he said, "give them to me to-night."

I'm in a hurry now." He looked at his watch.

"I'm afraid I can't promise the table till Monday," she said.

"That's all right."

"We'll try to make you comfortable."

Well, that was settled! And now for old Gilbert. . . .

### CHAPTER III: An Ambassador from Vickley

GILBERT was standing in the door of his room. "You crazy loon," he cried. "My God, I'm glad to see you." He threw his arms around Norman, and pulled him inside the door. "You've aged me ten years in the last two weeks, you son-of-a-gun."

"I'm sorry I've given you so much trouble, Gilbert," said Norman stiffly.

"Oh, it's all right," said Gilbert. "Now that it's turned out this way, it's perfectly all right. Couldn't be better. But tell me just one thing—what have you been doing these last two weeks?"

"Looking for work." And he told Gilbert briefly of his new job.

Gilbert slapped him on the shoulder. "I thought so. That's exactly what I've been telling them. Sit tight, I said, and trust me.—But I tell you, if you hadn't shown up to-day or to-morrow, my hair would have gone white. Two weeks is a long time to wait."

"But I wrote in my letter to my mother, from the station, not to worry—"

"I know what you wrote. And that there'd be news of you in two weeks. That's what I counted on. That's been my job—getting them to wait, instead of notifying the police."



"But really—why all this nonsense about suicide? Perhaps my letter wasn't as tactful as I thought it was—but after all—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Gilbert. "The suicide part and everything. It fitted in fine. You did everything just right."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. I thought I had done everything just wrong. I've realized that my behavior must have seemed very queer to the folks at home. But even so—suicide!"

"That's just the point, my boy. People can forgive anything to a man who's probably committed suicide. And when it turns out that you haven't, they're so glad, that nothing else matters. You framed the thing just right—that quarrel with your father, the mysterious references to the unknown girl, everything down to cashing that check at the cigar store and asking about the St. Louis train. Couldn't have been better."

These remarks were evidently intended to be reassuring; but they reminded Norman uncomfortably of what a fool he had behaved like in Vickley.

"I suppose you think I did it on purpose?" he said. "Well, I didn't. I was in a state of mind. I hardly knew what I was doing, Gilbert. But I still don't understand why you're so happy about it all."

"I'm happy, you son-of-a-gun, because you're alive. Here, have a drink."

Gilbert opened his suitcase and took out a bottle. "No? Well, I will. My nerves have gone to pieces

over this." He poured some whiskey into a tumbler, and drank.

"You know, Norman, you let me down something awful. That's no way to treat your lawyer. You ought to have told me what you were going to do. Here I arrived in Vickley with the thing all settled—and when I called up your house Sunday afternoon, hell was popping. I had to think fast."

"Gilbert—I know. I should have told you. I suppose I was afraid to. The truth is, I wasn't capable of reasonable thought."

"I gathered that something had gone wrong, so I went over to your house. And there I was, sweating blood while the thing came out bit by bit that evening."

Norman felt uncomfortable. He had expected Gilbert to scold him. He had been prepared for that. . . . But he wasn't prepared to hear all about just what had been happening in Vickley. . . . He really didn't want to know. . . . But Gilbert would want to tell him. He would have to listen. There was no way of getting out of it. . . .

"I didn't know exactly what you'd done, Norman, but I knew you were running amuck somehow," Gilbert went on, with a smile.

"You knew I had told Madge, at least," said Norman unhappily.

"Not at first. In fact, when I arrived, all that was known was that you hadn't come home to dinner, and that you had quarreled with your father at the

breakfast table. If I hadn't been on the inside of your affairs, I should have thought they were damned fools to be making so much fuss about nothing. And then they asked me if I had ever heard you mention a girl named Isabel!"

"But didn't Madge—or her aunt—tell them anything about—about the engagement being broken?"

"I've no doubt they supposed your family knew. And a silly thing happened there. It seems that your sister Lucinda had called up the Ferris house three or four times that morning, asking for you—"

"I know—about a dog."

"Yes. About a dog. I imagine that Madge made some reference to what had happened, but Lucinda didn't take it in. She kept talking about the dog. And at last Madge said, 'Oh, damn your dog!' So Lucinda cried, and wouldn't let your mother call up the Ferrises any more, even to ask about you. The first any of us in the house heard about the engagement being broken was when some kind neighbors came in to inquire if it were true. Your sister Lucinda seemed to rather hope it was, but she wouldn't let your mother call up and ask. I was the only one who had any notion of what had happened. All they were worried about was that their darling boy hadn't come home to dinner. Even when the neighbors said that Madge's aunt had taken to bed with nervous prostration, they didn't begin to suspect anything serious might be the matter—anything that would affect them. And there was I, knowing the dynamite

you were carrying around, and surer every minute that you had set it off."

Norman sighed. Must Gilbert go into all these painful details? Why not let the dead past be forgotten?

"I tell you," said Gilbert, "I was sweating blood!"

"It didn't occur to you, I suppose, to tell them the truth?" Norman asked with some asperity.

"There's where you do me an injustice, my boy. I'm more versatile than you think. I figured it all out—and this seemed to be one of those rare situations in which the truth might be better than the best lie that the mind of man could invent. Of course, I didn't want to do anything rash. If I gave the show away, and then you walked in with some other story—that *would* be a pretty mess! But I had a hunch that you weren't going to walk in. My hunches were mostly right, that day. I didn't understand what you were up to, all at once—not, in fact, till next day, when I got an answer to my wire to Dr. Zerneke. But I wasn't far wrong in my first guess."

"What *was* your first guess?" Norman asked, as patiently as he could. Of course, all this was interesting to Gilbert. The least he could do was to listen. . . .

"I thought you had come back in good faith, intending to keep your mouth shut and preserve the status quo—but that your damned honesty had got the best of you, and you had told Madge about the

baby, and then lit out for Chicago when she threw you over. Not a bad guess, either. And for my purposes it was as good as the whole story. The point was that you had probably spilled the beans. They say a good lawyer is one that can take advantage of a defeat. Well, I was defeated, all right. My plans were all smashed to hell—and there wasn't any use trying to patch them up. So I made new plans then and there. This has been one of the most interesting cases I ever handled, Norman—and if it had been tried in court I'd have made a great reputation on it. I figured that the whole town was my jury, or would be in twenty-four hours. There was no use trying to frame up any more alibis for you. I had to get the truth before the jury, and get you off that way. That's what I was thinking when the clock commenced to strike midnight. We all knew what time it was, but we sat still and listened—your mother and father, Lucinda and I. It finished striking. You hadn't come. And then there was a ring at the bell. We knew you wouldn't have rung, you'd have walked in. It might be anything—your dead body. Waiting under an emotional strain for somebody for a few hours will do that to people's minds! Well, it was your special delivery letter. Your mother was afraid to open it. Your father opened it. In that atmosphere, you see, your words weren't as cheerful as you intended them to be. News of you in two

weeks!—Not news *from* you, but news *of* you. It sounded like grim death itself.”

Norman twisted uncomfortably in his chair.

“I never thought of that, Gilbert. But *you* knew—”

“What did I know? Nothing. I didn’t guess until next day, when I heard from Dr. Zerneke about what you came home for. All I could think of then was that you were going to Chicago and make that girl marry you.”

“Of course—you didn’t know,” Norman murmured.

“But you were out of town—I knew that. And then we heard more about that. Somebody told the clerk at the cigar-store that your girl had jilted you. And he got worried, and confided to a policeman what he knew—the check, and the St. Louis train. And then some one recalled seeing a light in the Overbeck building. The police and the night-watchman had gone to your office, and found cigarette stubs all over the floor. So along towards one o’clock we heard from the police. Then your father called up the Ferrises. Madge answered the telephone. Yes, she said, it was true that she’d broken the engagement that morning. No, she hadn’t seen you since. But she’d had a telephone call from you at about eleven o’clock. You’d said something about being sorry, and hung up. No, she’d prefer not to say why she had broken the engagement. She was cool enough about it.”



"Cool?" Norman asked in surprise.

"Your sister Lucinda called it heartless. She kept on talking about how heartless Madge Ferris was. Finally she came out with something about poor Norman possibly lying dead at this very moment. Your mother ssh'd her, and told her not to be silly. But the thing had been said—the thing that was in everybody's mind. After all, when a man disappears like that, one of the possibilities *is* suicide."

"You keep harping on that, Gilbert. It's not a pleasant thought."

"I'm telling you just what happened."

"Of course. Go on."

"As a matter of fact, I was glad it had come to that. It put your family where I wanted them. It made the possibility of your being alive the only thing of any importance. And my mind was made up. You had told Madge about the baby, I was sure of that. The whole thing would come out. And now was the time to spring the truth. At the time, you see, I thought you were going to try to pull off a marriage with the other girl. It would be a sort of happy ending. But I looked at your sister Lucinda, and I thought again. I didn't want my effect spoiled by any discordant notes. And I didn't think she'd take so kindly to a happy ending that involved the mysterious Isabel. Your mother—it wouldn't hurt her to do a little worrying. Your father—he was the one that had to be told. Only not in that house. There was something else, if it



came to that, I was going to remind him of. So I suggested that he and I go down to the office where you had been camping all day. You might have left something there that the police hadn't found—a letter, or something of the sort. He was glad to go. Norman, if you ever had any doubt whether your father loves you—He was nearly crazy with anxiety. He had been trying to keep up a front with his women-folk, but alone with me in the office he was beginning to break down. He commenced to blame himself for a thousand things—including the way he had persuaded you against your wishes to go into the law. . . . Well, I told him the whole story."

"So he knows. . . ."

"Yes." Gilbert looked into his empty glass, and poured himself another drink. "Everybody knows. That's what I'm coming to. The whole damn town. And I'm the one that told them. Oh, I had good reasons. In the first place—you know what a lot of nonsense gets around—there was talk of your having embezzled some of the firm's money. I wanted to put a stop to that. But that's getting too far ahead. The next person I told the truth to was your fiancée."

"Madge? But she knew!"

"She knew what you told her, which wasn't much, I gather. Enough to give her the wrong slant on the whole thing. Well, somebody had to talk to her—and your sister Lucinda had taken to bed over what I had told your father the night before. Your

mother was busy looking after her. And your father was pretty much shot to pieces. So that left me, to attend to all these little things. The impression your sister Lucinda got of what I had told your father was that you were eloping with an artist's model. And, of course, with my connivance. The baby she simply didn't believe in. She would have it that you had been victimized by some designing female. Well, I didn't argue with her. I went to see Madge."

He would rather not hear that part of it. But he felt obliged to ask:

"What did Madge say?"

"At first she practically told me it was none of my business why she had broken the engagement. I said I could guess why it was, and reminded her that I had been with you in Chicago. She said, if I knew, there was no use discussing it. I admit I was pretty much stumped by her coolness. I wondered if she were really heartless, as your sister Lucinda said. But that wasn't it. She was really trying to be a good sport, as I found out afterward. She was trying not to hate the girl who had taken you away from her. She wasn't thinking about a baby at all. In fact, she didn't know about it."

"But I told her about the baby!" he protested.

"You didn't get it straight, Norman—or she didn't hear it. Or maybe her aunt mixed her up about it. You seem to have talked to her, too."

"Not about the baby, I think," said Norman,

making an effort to remember these things that seemed to have happened so many thousands of years ago.

"So Madge said. But between what you told the girl and what her aunt imagined, she got it wrong."

"What in the world did she think I had told her?"

"She didn't say in so many words. But I realized that I knew more about it than she did, so I started in to tell her the whole thing. And she was surprised from beginning to end. She was under the impression that you had been carrying on an affair with the other girl while being engaged to *her*."

"I didn't have a chance to go into details. But I'm sure I told her about the baby!"

"Not that the baby was already born. You neglected that detail. And so naturally she thought of a pregnant girl that you had to marry."

"So—that's what she meant. . . . She told me I was free—to go to her!"

"Exactly. I tell you, Norman, she's a good sport!"

"I see that I blundered the thing frightfully."

"You made it seem even worse than it was. But that's a good way of breaking bad news. She'd already suffered the worst. And what I told her—it took the poison out of the wound, so to speak."

"She'll think a little more kindly of me, perhaps," said Norman wistfully.

"She's sorry for you. And she's interested in your wanting the baby. I told her why you had

come home—to see if your people would take it. I had learned that from Dr. Zerneke over the long-distance. ‘Well, Madge,’ I asked, ‘can you hate him for a thing like that?’ And she said: ‘How could I hate him? I feel very humble.’”

“Humble!”

“To tell the truth, Norman, she thinks of you as a kind of saint.”

“Gilbert, don’t razz me.”

“Women are queer, Norman. Of course, there’s some credit due me as your advocate. I didn’t neglect my opportunities. And it *is* rather dramatic, you know—your throwing up a career and respectability, for the sake of your son. It’s the sort of thing women can understand.”

(Perhaps—but how did old Gilbert understand?)

“The only trouble is,” Gilbert went on, “it leaves her out. She’d rather be the other girl, I think. She can’t understand Isabel—why she won’t marry you. But then, as I told her, I don’t either.”

“You told her I had offered to marry Isabel?”

“Yes—and that you didn’t love her. That’s correct, I think?”

“Yes. How did Madge take that?”

“She seemed to understand it perfectly. It made you all the more saintlike.”

“Please lay off that, Gilbert.”

“If you depart from the beaten track, Norman, you have to take the consequences. You can’t do

what you've done without being regarded either as a scoundrel or a saint."

"I was prepared to be regarded as a scoundrel."

"Well, I've fixed that up for you, too. A saint to the women. . . . All except your mother and sister, Norman. They both, in their different ways, regard you as a child."

"You haven't mentioned my kid sister—Doris. I was really trying to protect her."

"So did we all. She was sent away to the neighbors or up to bed during all the family conferences, and told some sort of transparent fib about your being called out of town on business. But she strolled into our conference Monday night—I had just got through telling them my revised story about you—and announced with a bored air that we needn't trouble to keep the secret from her any longer. She knew all about Norman's baby, she said. As a matter of fact, she heard this new story before the family did. It appears that the news, coming from some girl friend of Madge's, had spread like wild-fire among the younger generation. They all knew it by evening."

"Do you think it will—hurt her much?" Norman asked anxiously.

"Doris? On the contrary, she's quite a heroine on account of it. Times are changing, Norman!"

"In Vickley!" said Norman incredulously.

Gilbert looked at him gravely.

"I haven't intended to deceive you, Norman. You

know perfectly well that you've cooked your goose, as far as the law business goes. If you wanted to set up as a romantic poet, it might be all right for you to come back. But not as a lawyer. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Thank God for that!"

"Well, be that as it may, Norman, your career in Vickley is gone completely and absolutely to smash. There's not a moment's doubt about that. And there's not a thing I or anybody else can do about that. You had me beaten there. The only thing I could gain was what is called a moral victory. And since that's all I have to boast of, Norman, I'm boasting of that. Let me go ahead and tell you about my speech to the jury!"

"All right."

"But first I'll help myself to another drink."

## CHAPTER IV: Speech to the Jury

“**A**ND now,” said Norman, “what about this alleged moral victory? You didn’t by any chance tell people the real truth about me?”

Gilbert put his feet up on a chair. He, at any rate, was enjoying these reminiscences.

“Yes. This business of telling the truth is like any other drug habit. It grows on you. That same Monday night, after I left your house, I dropped in at Sam’s place for a drink. There were half a dozen men there—and Sam, behind the bar. One of the men was Davis of the Herald and another was Quinn of the Whig. I won’t name the others, but they are pillars of Vickley society. Well, Quinn came up to me and asked if I had heard the rumor that you were in financial difficulties when you left town—not that they would print anything about it, unless something came up so that they would be obliged to. Well, I had an inspiration. ‘Boys,’ I said, ‘I’m going to tell you the truth about the disappearance of Norman Overbeck. You can decide for yourself whether it can be printed.’—And not a word has been in the papers since. They couldn’t have printed the story anyway—not in Vickley. But it was a magnificent gesture. ‘This is for all of you



to hear," I said. And so I made my speech to the jury right there at Sam's bar. The doors were locked—Sam saw to that—so there wouldn't be any interruptions. I'd had two or three rehearsals of my speech already, between your family and Madge, but this time it was for a different audience. These men were hard-boiled guys, and not in love with you. . . ."

"You—you didn't—I mean—all that stuff about it's being somebody else—some other man—you didn't suggest that?" Norman asked painfully.

"I cast no doubts on the paternity of your son, Norman, if that's what you mean. I wasn't out to make a fool of you. On the contrary. A scoundrel. It came to me in a flash. A saint—that was all very well for the women. But men don't like saints. I had to make you out a villain—but a magnificent villain, such as men secretly envy. And I had learned something, Norman. I had learned that the paternal passion is repressed in our polite species—repressed, I believe, is the word—but not extinct. I was depending on that. I looked at my jury, and I said: 'It isn't embezzlement, gentlemen. It's a baby.' One fellow snickered. I thought: 'All right—I'll have *you* crying before I've finished!' And I did, too. . . ."

"What in God's name did you tell them, Gilbert?"

"The story of a respectable man and his illegitimate son. I must admit that I embroidered it a little.

You know you dropped that hint about St. Louis—and several people saw you get on that train. Which shows the value of evidence. Well, I followed up that hint—saying that it was only a guess of mine. I said you had been talking to me about South America. I said I thought you had gone there. And why South America? Because it's a Man's Country. I'd been reading a story about it in Mencken's Mercury, and I laid in on thick. There a man begets his children by all the girls he takes a fancy to. And he doesn't have to sneak out of his responsibilities—the country isn't run by a lot of old-maid Sunday-school teachers. When he gets tired of a girl he gives her a present and tells her to get out. But she leaves her baby behind. A South American gentleman, I gave them to understand, has a dozen bright and happy illegitimate children, and a big house in the country where he raises them, and visits them, and plays with them—and everybody, including the lawful wife, knows all about it. I pictured you, Norman, as a fellow that wasn't going to be bluffed out of his natural feelings by our hypocritical civilization. If you couldn't have your son with you in Vickley, you were going to South America, where such things are understood. Mind you, I said, I'm not defending the young man, I'm only trying to explain him. But I could see that the idea appealed to the crowd. There's something of the Turk and the Mormon in us all. The truth is, we'd like not only to go to bed with all the pretty girls

we take a fancy to, but we'd like to have them go right ahead and have their babies. And you needn't tell me the girls don't feel the same way about it. If polygamy wasn't so damned expensive, that's the way we'd do it, too. The aristocracy has always had its bastards without shame and apparently to the satisfaction of all concerned. It's only our middle-class economy that has made us a race of hypocrites."

Norman looked at old Gilbert in astonishment. "I hope you don't expect me to live up to your romantic stories!"

"But, Norman—don't go back on me now. You're planning to adopt the boy, aren't you? I made sure of that when Dr. Zerneke said you were calling up every day about him."

Norman flushed. "Of course I'm going to adopt him. But I don't feel in the least like a Mormon or a Turk. Or a saint either."

"Well, you've made a good start in both directions. Norman, my boy"—Gilbert emptied the bottle into his tumbler—"you've done what every man at some time in his life wishes he dared to do—and what every woman feels instinctively that a real man ought to do."

"Gilbert—all this excitement has gone to your head. You're talking bosh. Every man in America doesn't beget a child out of wedlock. You see, I happen to know the statistics. It comes to only

about—I've figured it out for Vickley: let me think. If Vickley runs true to statistical averages, there are only about twenty new illegitimate fathers there per year. And there are nearly twelve thousand males in Vickley between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five. So you see it's really quite the exception, Gilbert."

"Your statistics, my boy, apply only to the illegitimate children that are actually born. I'm talking of the others. There may be men in Vickley who have never in all their lives sent a girl to the abortionist—but I'd not bet on any of them being there at Sam's bar that night. And that's what they were all thinking of—the girls who had cried because they couldn't go ahead and have their babies—the girls whose abortions they had paid for—the girls who, as they damn well knew, despised them for being the dirty cowards that we respectable men have to be!"

Norman looked at him curiously—wonderingly. . . . What did old Gilbert know about such things?

The telephone rang. Gilbert took up the receiver.

"A telegram? Yes, send it up."

He turned to Norman. "That will be from your father. I wired him that the lost was found and in good shape."

They waited. There was a knock at the door, and the boy with the telegram. Gilbert read it and handed it to Norman.

In the stiff, reticent phrases that were so like his father, it read:

PLEASED AND GRATEFUL WILL ARRIVE CHI-  
CAGO SUNDAY MORNING AS PLANNED

OVERBECK

Ten words.

## CHAPTER V: The Older Generation

LATE that evening they were talking in Norman's new room. . . . They had dined together, going over the whole situation. Gilbert wasted no time in vain regrets. He accepted the new state of Norman's affairs, and was anxious to help him make the best of his Chicago career. He took Norman's job seriously, and discussed its future possibilities. And Gilbert had readily come with him to see the baby. He remarked upon its resemblance to Norman. They met Mrs. Czermak's mother, whose name was Mrs. Case, and another daughter named Monica, a young stenographer. Also Mr. Victor, an elderly violinist, one of the boarders, just then out of a job. . . . Everybody, it seemed, was interested in the baby. . . .

"You know," said Norman awkwardly, "he was named for me—by his mother."

Gilbert nodded. "Queer girl!" he said.

They talked of Isabel. She had left town, said Norman; had probably gone to Michigan, he thought. It was just as well, he said coldly. He hadn't wanted to see her again. . . .

Then they talked of Norman's father—of whom Norman had been secretly and painfully thinking all the while. . . .

It was all very well to have gained what old Gilbert called a moral victory over the hard-boiled reprobates at Sam's bar; over romantic Vickley matrons who wished to believe in a remarkable young male saint engaged in expiating his youthful sin by self-sacrifice; over a sensation-loving younger generation: over even that girl whose love and pride his destiny had driven him to trample upon so cruelly: but there remained J. J. Overbeck. No moral victory was possible over him!

His father simply would not be able to understand what had happened. How could he? A man like that! No, this sort of thing might be comprehensible to a cynical philosopher like old Gilbert. But it would be outside the range of his father's imaginative sympathy. That was what was going to make this meeting so hard. He couldn't help wanting to make his father understand. And that would be impossible.

"Still afraid of the old man?" asked Gilbert, smiling, as he read Norman's thoughts, so plain to see in his troubled face.

"I can't help it," said Norman. "No, it's not exactly that I'm afraid of him. But I know that he won't be able to understand this at all."

"No?" said Gilbert. "Well, I wouldn't worry about that, if I were you."

"His whole life," said Norman, "has gone to building up his family. He thinks in terms of the family. You say he loves me—but it's just because I'm part of the family. I was to take his place in



Vickley. I've hurt him in a way he never can forgive."

"Norman," said Gilbert, "maybe I know your father better than you do. We were in Cuba together, you know. Before you were born."

"Are you hinting at something, Gilbert?" Norman asked in astonishment.

"I never hint, Norman. I'm going to tell you a story. Because I think you ought to know it before your father comes. He won't say a word to you about it. But he'll know I've told you. He couldn't do it. Just as I couldn't tell my own son. But I know he'd like you to know."

"My—father!" Norman whispered incredulously.

"Listen, Norman. That Sunday night, after midnight, when your father and I sat in his office—after I'd told him about your baby—he broke down. And . . . well, you see I've known something about your father for a long time. He didn't know I knew it. I'd never have told you, but it's all right now. So I'll begin with that.—You think of your father as an old man, don't you? Just as you think of me as 'old Gilbert.' Yes, it's true he's fifty-five and wears side-whiskers. . . . It's hard to go on, Norman, with you looking at me like that. I know how you feel. But he's not *my* father—so it didn't so much shock me to learn, as I did a good many years ago by accident, that he had—well, a secret life. Don't look so God-damn' solemn. It all happened before you were born. A rather plain woman in her thirties. A widow. I knew her name, but that meant nothing

to me at the time. She is dead, now. This is all ancient history. She left Vickley about the time you were born, went out West to visit some relatives; and, as I learned the other night, came back to Vickley some years later—but it was all over then—and died. . . . Well, are you wishing I wouldn't tell you?"

"I—it does upset me, rather," Norman confessed. "I've no right to feel like that, I know. But—"

"Of course. One's own father. And that's the true origin of our conventional morality, my boy. I hear stuff about the hypocrisy of the older generation. It's true enough—but whose fault is it? Who puts us up on a pedestal? Who refuses to believe that we are merely human? You wait! You've a son now. He'll have an ideal of you—and you won't dare shatter it. You'll lie, like all the rest of us. You'll be a hypocrite, too. Oh, it's a joke! . . .

"Well, I knew this thing about your father. And I smiled a little. But I didn't know the real story till that night. . . . It goes back to the time we were in Cuba together, in the Spanish war. I don't know why your father enlisted. He was married, and had a child. I guess your mother was all taken up with the child—your sister Lucinda. I know that I went for fun. I was married, too. Anyway, we were both old enough to know better, but there we were.

"Well, there was another Vickley boy in our com-

pany, named Tom. Tom had never been any good at making money. Some new scheme he had put his hopes in went to smash—I guess he couldn't bear to face his wife. He thought he was a failure, so he enlisted. And Tom and Jim—your father—got to be great friends in the army. Chums was the word in those days. I knew about their friendship. But I hadn't thought of poor Tom in all these years. . . .

“Your father, that night, began to talk about Tom. And he began to cry. Then I remembered about their being chums. But all the rest was new to me, as your father told it. I never had known about Tom's wife. . . .

“Jim and Tom were both wounded at El Caney—Tom badly. He was going to die, and he knew it. And there on the battlefield where they lay together he talked to Jim about Sally. Would Jim look after Sally when he got back? And Jim promised his chum that he would. And Tom died in the hospital, and Jim came home to Vickley.

“That was twenty-eight years ago, Norman. Sally must have been about thirty, then. Tom had written her a lot about Jim, and she was prepared to like him. And of course she must have been terribly grateful for the help he gave her. But Jim didn't tell his wife about it. And he went to see Sally in the evenings when he was supposed to be working at the office. He would bring something for a late supper. She was a jolly little woman, and

her house was comfortable. He got to be more at ease there than at home. And so it began.

"And so it went on. As such things do. Till you were born, and then he sent Sally out West, and that was the end of it. She came back later, and died.

"That's all. Except . . . You belong to a hard, unsentimental generation, Norman. It will seem silly to you. . . . But there's her grave, in a Vickley cemetery. He sometimes visits it alone. He goes at night. Do you—do you get the picture, Norman?"

Norman saw, in the moonlight, a cemetery with its marble memorials of Vickley's respectable dead. And over in an unkempt corner, a place that meant nothing except to the one who kept its secret tight-locked in his breast. And thither he saw that old man come, stealthily, with a posy—an old man, looking down at his lost youth, buried there in that secret grave. And Norman saw him slink away furtively in the moonlight, back to his home, his family, his career, his respectability, home from that secret, ridiculous, pitiful tryst. Symbol of an age that passes. . . .

"Yes—I get the picture," said Norman.

"He'll know I've told you," said Gilbert. "He wants you to know. But he'll not want anything said about it—not a word."

"Of course not," said Norman.

## CHAPTER VI: J. J. Overbeck

**H**IS father was due to arrive on an early train Sunday morning, and Norman, having forgotten his alarm clock, had asked Mrs. Case that night if there was one about the house he could borrow. He explained that he had to meet his father at seven. "Rose will be up at six to give the baby his bottle," she told him. "She'll knock on your door at half-past six, and leave you a cup of coffee, if you like." Norman protested that he couldn't think of putting her to that trouble. But Mrs. Case said it would be no trouble; she made it for herself anyway.

When the knock came, he sleepily answered "Yes." And not Mrs. Czermak's but her younger sister's voice answered cheerfully: "Here's your coffee, Mr. Overbeck. And would you like to have me call you a taxi?"

"Yes, please do!" he said.

"All right. It'll be here when you're ready."

He opened the door when she had gone, and brought in the tray she had left on the floor.

There was toast, too!

"What a nice family!" he thought gratefully.

He was at the station in plenty of time. Gilbert, it was agreed, would stay at his hotel until called for, or they would all meet for lunch. Norman

watched the gate, and the stream of passengers. There was his father. . . . Gilbert's story seemed perfectly incredible.

"Well, Father," he said.

"Well, Norman."

"Let me take your grip. Did you manage to get any sleep?"

"I slept pretty well. Where are you taking me?"

"We'll have breakfast, and then I'll take you to my room."

"It's not breakfast time for me yet. This is Sunday, you know. You'd better take me to your room first."

"Certainly."

In the taxi he said: "Does your job permit of your taking taxis like this?"

It was his kind of humor.

"Only for very distinguished visitors," said Norman.

"I don't know why Chicago is supposed to be such an ugly city," said Norman's father, presently. "I think it can hold up its head."

"Michigan Avenue isn't bad-looking," said Norman.

They passed the Art Institute.

"Been buying any more pictures?" asked J. J. Overbeck.

That was probably humor, too.

"Not on my present salary. I get thirty a week at present," said Norman.

"Thirty a week is not bad to start with," said J. J. Overbeck. "I know young lawyers in Vickley who make less."

There was a silence.

"What are you working at? If you don't mind my knowing."

"Not at all. Advertising. Wilkins and Freeman."

"I've heard of them."

Silence again.

"You neglected to pack a trunk when you left home. Your mother attended to it last night. It ought to be here to-morrow." He took a stub out of his vest pocket and gave it to his son.

"Thanks."

He would have liked to have his father say something more about his mother, and how she felt about all this. But he would not ask. And his father made no further reference to the family.

"All right," thought Norman, "who cares?"

The taxi drew up presently at the curb.

"Here's where I live."

He took his father to his room. The bed had been made, and there was a vase of flowers on the table. To be sure, a visit from the baby's grandfather was an important occasion. They were being damn' nice to him, these people. . . . Tears came into his eyes.

Father and son sat down.

"Comfortable place," said Norman's father.



"Yes. Very."

"And—where do you keep the baby?"

So his father assumed—for Gilbert hadn't told him—that the baby would be here! Of course—since that was what Norman had left home for. . . . Well, he was right. . . .

"Upstairs," said Norman. "I'll find out if we can see him now."

He went out in search of Mrs. Czermak. The younger sister was in the hall, apparently waiting.

"Is he ready to see the baby now?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, if he may."

"He's in our room—the big room. You can go on up, any time."

"Thank you."

He went back. "We can go right up," he told his father.

He led the way to the upstairs room. Outside the door he started to say something, in an ordinary tone of voice, but his father silenced him with an abrupt, authoritative gesture. "You'll wake him up," he said in a low tone.

J. J. Overbeck opened the door quietly, and went in. Mrs. Czermak was there, with a white cap and apron on. She came forward pleasantly, but J. J. Overbeck ignored her. He went past her straight to the crib, stooped over and looked at the sleeping baby. The morning sunlight, pouring in, lighted up his pink face with its grey side-whiskers, bent over

the crib. Norman came closer. His father remained stooped in that way for a full minute. Then he uncovered the baby's plump hand, and felt of it. Then the feet, in their tiny socks. Norman looked up to see whether Mrs. Czermak approved of these liberties. Apparently she did. She was looking on with quiet satisfaction. Her mother, and the younger sister, who had slipped into the room, were beaming.

Then, deliberately and with assurance, J. J. Overbeck lifted the baby from the crib and held it in his arms. It slept on. J. J. Overbeck, not paying any attention to the others, marched slowly around the room, twice. Then he went back to the crib, and laid the baby down gently, and covered it up. Then he turned and walked quietly out of the room.

Norman followed him.

In Norman's room, his father took out a cigar, and offered one, saying: "Not that it's good for any one's digestion, to smoke before breakfast."

"I'd rather have a cigarette, if you don't mind," said Norman.

They sat down.

"Have you made a new will?" his father asked.

"Why, no," said Norman,—remembering what Dr. Zerke had told him as to the sensible way of proceeding in this affair.

"You'd better, right away. That's the thing to do. We can get Gilbert Rand to help us draw it up to-day."

Yes, Dr. Zerneke had said that he was to make up with his father, and then make the child his heir. . . .

"I suppose I'd better," he said.

"Have you named him?"

"His mother—named him Norman."

Doubtless it would be politic to suggest calling him James Norman. . . . But he wasn't going to.

"Norman." His father nodded thoughtfully.

There was a long silence, while J. J. Overbeck smoked.

"I'm not going to change the firm name," he said, with an air of finality.

Norman frowned in a puzzled way.

"I'm not expecting to come back," he said.

"I wasn't suggesting that precisely," said his father. "I hope you will find the advertising business agreeable. But I still think I shall let the firm name stand as it is. To do otherwise would seem a concession to vulgar prejudice."

As he spoke, he glanced thoughtfully over Norman's head. At the ceiling, one would have said. But Norman's mind followed that glance through plaster and flooring to the upstairs room and the cradle. Was that what his father was thinking of? A day in the future when, if he lived that long, he should see another Overbeck in the firm?

("Not if I know it!" thought Norman.)

"Now, as to financial arrangements," said his father. "Of course, I expect you to take care of

yourself. But for the child—and for any emergencies—there'll be a thousand dollars in the bank that you can draw on this year if you should need it. It will be put in a savings account, in your son's name, you understand."

Norman resolved never to touch it. . . . But he must not offend his father.

"It's very good of you," he said stiffly.

J. J. Overbeck rose. "It's time for breakfast," he said. "We'll go to the hotel and rout out Gilbert Rand."

## CHAPTER VII: Home

**H**IS father had gone, taking the night train for Vickley. Gilbert Rand had gone with him. Norman went back to his room on the elevated.

Now that it was all over, he could permit himself to realize what a frightful strain his father's visit had been. . . . Old Gilbert's romantic yarn about him still seemed incredible. Oh, no doubt it was true enough—but it hadn't changed his feelings about his father. Nothing, it seemed, could change those feelings—not even his father's extraordinary generosity about the baby. . . . Gilbert had thought that his story of that lonely grave in the moonlight was a touch of nature which would make him feel that his father was made of the same human stuff as himself. It should have done so, but it didn't. The gulf of generation was between them. His father was still—his father. And he was tremendously glad that it was all over.

Things had gone to the satisfaction of everybody concerned—except, perhaps, of Norman himself. A will had been drawn up; even a codicil to J. J. Overbeck's will, leaving Norman's share of his father's property, in case of Norman's death, to "my grandson, Norman Overbeck, the natural son of my son Norman." They visited Dr. Zerneke at her

office; she said that of course the Society would be glad to have the child adopted by its father; it would be formally arranged within a few days, she promised. And J. J. Overbeck made out a check to the Society which far more than covered the expenses to which it had been put in this matter. He also offered casually to pay any outstanding surgical or hospital bills. . . .

This was the only reference to Isabel's part in the matter. And for some reason that fact gave Norman an inward satisfaction. He had been treated that way on his first visit to Dr. Zerneke's office—as a mere biological instrumentality connected with the production of a child! Now it was her turn. And she deserved it, he thought vindictively. Yet it did not escape him that he was still being treated, himself, in something of the same impersonal fashion. The interests of the child alone were being considered—which was quite all right. Yet he vaguely felt it as a conspiracy to fasten upon this child the network of Vickley. . . . True, they were only doing, with a generosity which he had not expected, and a practical care exceeding his own impulsive efforts, what he himself had sought to do by marrying the child's mother. They were undertaking merely to secure to his son, in so far as that could be done by legal means, all those rights which would otherwise be lost by the accident of birth outside of marriage. It was damned fine of them! Why, then, must he feel all the while as though

there were something sinister in these proceedings? He remembered that glance of his father's at the ceiling. . . . Oh, doubtless he was being unduly sensitive! His feelings as a parent were not being taken sufficient account of. It was too abrupt a change from the heroic and rebellious rôle he had been playing for two weeks! It was as if Vickley said:

"A child is the tribe's concern. Either a child does not officially exist for us, or it does. It would have been simpler for you to have let this child remain, so far as we are concerned, non-existent. But if you force the matter upon our attention, we shall take your child into the tribe. But it is we who give sanction to its existence—not you."

Well, it was over, for the time being. It now remained only for the Adoption Society to take formal action. The child would be his. . . . He wondered if Isabel knew. . . . But there was no reason why she should know. It was a matter of indifference to her what happened to the child. . . . So long as she didn't have to bother with it herself. . . .

Norman abruptly realized that he was at his station.

He would try to put these legalistic matters out of his mind. After all, he was living in the same house with his son. . . . Dr. Zerneke had been rather surprised when he told her that. But they couldn't take that privilege away from him.



He had just entered his room when there was a knock at the door. It was the elderly musician, Mr. Victor.

"Pardon me," he said with a smile, "but I'd like to hear the news, if I may."

"The news?"

"You see, we can't help all being interested in the little drama. We'd like to see it turn out right—for the sake of the little fellow."

"Oh—come in."

Of course—it would be a drama to them. They had seen his father—quite evidently somebody of consequence in his own world—they couldn't help seeing that. And a son in evident poverty and disgrace. The family hadn't approved of the marriage, they would think. But the sight of the baby conquers the grandfather's stony heart—Abie's Irish Rose, in fact. Well, they ought to be satisfied with the dénouement. That glance of his father's at the ceiling had been a promise (or a threat, if one were so unreasonable as to take it so!) that this child should be one of the lords of Vickley! He might tell this romantic old bird that. It was what he wanted to hear—what every one, including Dr. Zerneke, seemed to be hoping for. . . .

"Won't you sit down," said Norman. "And as to the little drama, I think I can say that I have received assurances that my own follies will not be held against the child." That was sufficiently nineteenth-century to suit the occasion, he thought.

"The girls will be pleased," said the old man. "They are very fond of the baby."

There was another knock at the door.

"I think it's them," said Mr. Victor, with a smile. "Wanting to hear."

Norman opened the door. It was the younger sister, Monica.

"Excuse me, Mr. Overbeck," she said eagerly. "But what did he think of the baby?"

Norman was touched at her interest, but he replied casually:

"Well—he seemed favorably impressed. Didn't you think so?"

"Yes! we both thought so. Did he say anything?"

Norman smiled. "My father doesn't say much," he told her. "I mean, when he's pleased. One has to judge by the way he acts."

"He certainly acted pleased."

"Won't you sit down?"

"No—I just came in to ask. You don't mind my asking? We couldn't help being anxious."

"Well, it's all right," he said reassuringly.

"I'm so glad!" she said, and was about to go when he remembered:

"I haven't thanked you for the flowers—and the coffee. It was terribly nice of you."

"Oh—the coffee," she said. "We'd be very glad to bring you your coffee every morning, if you'd like it. You get to work at eight, don't you? We're

having our own at seven, and it would be no trouble at all!"

"Then you must let me pay you for it," he said.

"Oh, I don't think my sister would want that," she said.

"We'll discuss that later, then," he said.

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night."

"A nice family," he remarked to Mr. Victor.

"Yes," said Mr. Victor. "A very nice family. Not the usual type of people who keep rooming-houses. I know."

"They've been so friendly," said Norman. "I don't feel as though I were among strangers at all."

"We tried to make it homelike," said Mr. Victor ingenuously. "I may say that the idea of Mrs. Czermak wearing her nurse's costume was my own contribution, or suggestion. I thought it would help to impress your father favorably."

"Has Mrs. Czermak been a nurse-maid?" asked Norman.

"Yes. Babies of her own—that's what she needs," said Mr. Victor wisely.

"She's not a widow, is she?" asked Norman.

"No. But she isn't living with her husband, you know."

"I didn't know."

"Well, it's not exactly a secret. He ran away."

"Oh!"

"I might as well tell you," said Mr. Victor. "He was a very young man, and a poet. Vladimir Czermak was his name. He also tried to write music. Very modern music." Mr. Victor shook his head. "As to his poetry, I am perhaps not so well qualified to judge. But I have read some of it. . . ."

"He wrote in English?"

"Yes. If it could be called English. He used to show me his things. He had a room here. That was how it began. But he looked like a genius. She has his picture—you must get her to show it to you some time. The Irish, if you have noticed, have a tenderness for genius. Mrs. Case allowed him to get behind in his rent. And then he married her daughter. She was a nurse-maid then. To tell you the truth, I think what she wanted was a baby of her own. But that wasn't his idea at all. He was afraid of the responsibility. As a matter of fact he couldn't very well afford to have a family. A young genius who is an unskilled worker and odd-job man is a poor stick as a husband and father. He wanted her not to have the baby, and when she went ahead having it he cleared out."

"And what happened to her baby?"

"It was prematurely born, and it died very soon afterward."

"Hard luck," said Norman.

"I don't think she or the baby had the right kind of care," said Mr. Victor. "Poor people go to poor

doctors. But Dr. Zerneke has been very good to her. She performed some kind of operation that was needed, and she gave her a baby to nurse. Your child is the third she has taken care of for Dr. Zerneke. She gets very much attached to them, and feels very bad at having to give them up. I understand," he added, "that you may leave your baby here for some time."

"I probably shall," said Norman.

"She's hoping so," said Mr. Victor. "She's devoted to it."

"And she hasn't heard from her husband since he went away?"

"No. She's going to get a divorce shortly."

"The family isn't Catholic, then?"

"Their father was Protestant Irish, and the girls have broken away from the Church. And Dr. Zerneke seems to have persuaded the mother that it wasn't a real marriage in the Catholic sense, on account of his not wanting to have a baby—something like that. At any rate, her scruples have been more or less overcome. She isn't sure it's quite right, but she's making no protest. She realizes that Rose ought to be married again and having her own babies."

"How old is she—Mrs. Czermak?"

"Twenty-seven. That was one of the difficulties about her marriage. The boy was three or four years younger."

"And her sister—how old is she?"

"Monica is twenty."

"A nice kid," said Norman, thinking of his sister Doris, and remembering Monica's offer to bring him coffee every morning. He couldn't help being moved by the sisterly kindnesses he was finding in his new home.

"It's a very pleasant place here," he said.

"Your wife is in Colorado for her health, I understand?" said Mr. Victor.

They discussed the state of health of Norman's alleged wife.

"You mustn't be discouraged," said Mr. Victor encouragingly. "Everything will come out all right." He rose to go.

"Thank you," said Norman, "I'm sure it will."

"That's the right spirit!" said Mr. Victor.

It was a little embarrassing to be sympathized with on such fictitious grounds. Nevertheless, after old Mr. Victor had taken his friendly leave, Norman found himself wondering why all homes couldn't be as pleasant and comfortable as this one.

He said to himself that his new life had really begun.

## CHAPTER VIII: Apron Strings

**D**URING that protracted Sunday conference Dr. Zerneke had suggested to Norman that he come to her home some evening that week, to clear up the situation in a talk of a less formal and legalistic sort. The engagement had been made for Monday evening.

But on Monday morning, when Monica brought his coffee, he was up, and they conversed for a moment at the door; and she reminded him that this was the baby's birthday. At that age, it appeared, birthdays came every month, and this was his first. It was to be a sort of special occasion; and it would be the first time (not counting that time at the hospital) that he had seen his son awake.

He called up the doctor that afternoon and, explaining his reasons, postponed the engagement. It was arranged that he should call Wednesday evening instead.

Junior's birthday party—for now the girls called the baby by that name—was the pleasantest sort of contrast to Isabel's impersonal indifference that day in the hospital. It was infinitely agreeable to Norman, the sight of these girls bending over his child—cooing to him, and triumphantly eliciting his smile. They knew every dimple by heart. And unques-



tionably the baby was rosier, plumper, happier, than he had been with that unnatural mother of his. It ministered to some deep need in Norman's heart, the picture of maternal solicitude which these girls presented—Rose with her grave motherly preoccupation, and Monica with her joyous young excitement over every detail of this budding life. It made him very happy. He sat in the room on those evenings with his child and its young nurses, enchanted. Their mother, Mrs. Case, was there, too, sometimes—and occasionally he felt a little embarrassed by her Rabelaisian comments on babies and some of their natural functions; but the girls paid no attention, and he soon learned not to mind her way of talking. . . . Mr. Victor would drop in, too, to enjoy the spectacle.

"You can see him bathed Sunday morning," said Monica enthusiastically.

And on Tuesday evening, after the ceremony of the bottle was over, and Mr. Victor was chatting with him in his room, Monica came in. "My sister doesn't like to ask," she said, "but you see—she and Ma have to be out to-morrow evening. It's about Rose's divorce. There's some witnesses we have to see. Of course, I could stay and look after the baby, but I'm the one who has been talking to the lawyers, and I really know more about it than they do. I ought to go along. And we wondered—I wondered—if you were going to be in that evening. Because if you were, I thought you wouldn't mind staying up

in our room, next to the nursery. Of course, if you're going to be out, I can stay at home just as well. It's only for a couple of hours. We'll be home in time to give him his ten o'clock bottle. I thought maybe you'd like to!"

This was an occasion much too important to be sacrificed to a mere conference with Dr. Zerneke.

"I'd be very glad to," he said.

He called up Dr. Zerneke the next day, and the engagement was postponed until Friday.

On Friday evening, then, a little before ten, not without regrets at having to miss the important occasion of the day, he walked over to Dr. Zerneke's home.

It was an apartment some blocks away from her office, in a less imposing building. He had been told to ring the janitor's bell, and "if I'm not there, the key's on the lintel above the door." Having passed the inspection of the janitress, he climbed the stairs, to the top floor. There was no answer to his knock, so he let himself in according to instructions.

The ceilings at the front were low, with a garret-like slant. There were easy chairs, a large couch heaped with cushions, a little table with a coffee-bulb and cups set out, large bookcases filled with books. The rest of the wall space was occupied with etchings, lithographs, and oils. Here was one of Nordfeldt's New Mexico etchings—he had several of that series himself. A lithograph by Picasso. And here was a Springer. . . . He hadn't gone to

Springer's exhibit. Well, he was a workingman now. Not an art patron any more. . . .

Dr. Zerneke entered, carrying her medicine case.

"You let yourself in—good. I'll make some coffee in a moment."

Norman asked: "Can I do anything?"

"No. Sit down."

Dr. Zerneke went into another room, put away her things, and came back. She carried the coffee-bulb into the kitchen, returned with it filled with water, and lighted the alcohol lamp.

"Why," she asked, "didn't you consult me before going to live at Mrs. Czermak's?"

"It didn't occur to me that it was a matter to consult anybody about," Norman answered, a little defiantly. After all, he had not left home to take orders on every little thing from Dr. Zerneke.

"Is there," he asked, "any reason why I should not live there?"

"It's merely," said Dr. Zerneke, "that it will make it more difficult for her to give up the baby."

"That won't be necessary for some time, I presume," said Norman.

"I had not planned to leave the baby there more than a few weeks," said Dr. Zerneke.

"But why?" asked Norman in surprise. "I thought it was a fine place."

"It has its merits. But I should prefer to put your baby in another boarding-home, where there are other children, so that he won't be spoiled by

too much devotion. And you can see that your being there makes it unnecessarily embarrassing."

"Yes, I can see that. But what I can't see is why the baby should be taken away." It really seemed to him as though Dr. Zerneke were saying that to annoy him.

"I think," he added, "I might be allowed to be the judge of that. I was going to ask you if the Adoption Society hadn't passed on the matter of the adoption, by the way."

"And I was going to tell you that the Society has decided that the proper procedure in this case would be for the mother to turn over the child to you herself."

"But she's already given it up to the Society!" said Norman.

"That would be cancelled. It may be a legal quibble, but for some reason this procedure is preferable. I've written to your father about it."

"Where is Isabel—in Paris?"

"No—she doesn't sail till the eleventh of May, according to her plans. She's still in Michigan, resting. There won't be much of a delay. As soon as she signs the papers we've sent her, the child will be your own. And for that reason, I think I ought to explain to you why you should not leave him at Mrs. Czermak's indefinitely. The atmosphere of the place is all wrong. That kind of neurotic devotion is all right for a few weeks, but you don't want the child to get too accustomed to it."

"Would you call them neurotic?" Norman asked defensively. "I should have said they were a very healthy lot."

"It's the situation that is unhealthy. I'm thinking particularly of Mrs. Czermak herself. The obvious thing to say is that she needs babies of her own—and it's quite true. She let her maternal instincts be exploited for a long time in a nurse-maid's job. Then, when she did get married, it was to a no-account young genius who wanted to be the baby of the family himself. And since her baby died, I've been exploiting her for the benefit of other women's babies. No, I don't call it healthy to break her heart over children that don't belong to her. Just because it's your child that she's in love with doesn't mean that everything's all right. And when she does have to give him up, you can thank yourself for making it worse for her."

"But how have I made it any the worse?"

"A man around the house—her baby's father—why, it's almost like being married! I'm not suggesting that she's necessarily in love with you, Mr. Overbeck—and if she were, it would not be so much a tribute to your own charms as to the fact that you are the baby's father. Her baby's, as she wishes to feel."

"Am I to take this as a warning?" Norman asked coldly.

"Stranger things have happened. Of course, if you wish to settle down there permanently"—Dr.

Zerneke smiled—"you'd find her an excellent wife in many respects."

"Good heavens!" said Norman, horrified. "I never realized that these things were so frightfully complicated. I only wanted to get acquainted with my son. I've only seen him five times—awake, that is."

"And to-night it was my fault that you were dragged away from the happy scene, wasn't it?" said Dr. Zerneke. "Thoughtless of me!"

The boiling water plunged upward through the glass tube furiously, and Dr. Zerneke put out the flame beneath.

"Things came off very well Sunday, didn't they?" she said.

"My father," he replied uncomfortably, "was more than kind."

"Yes—he was sensible, which is more to the point. When is your mother coming?"

He hesitated. "No definite date has been set," he told her.

"Have you asked her?"

"She knows where I am. She can come if she wants to."

"Have you written to her at all?"

"No," he said reluctantly.

"Nor to any of your family?"

"No. Why should I?"

"You must remember that you repudiated them, when you left home without telling them about the



baby. Don't you suppose families have feelings? They won't come to see the baby till you invite them."

"Oh, I suppose I should."

"Yes, I think you'd better. And I also think it might be just as well if you were living somewhere else when your mother and sisters come to see you, if you don't mind my saying so."

He realized what she meant—they wouldn't like his being so much at home there. And his sister Lucinda would be suspicious of Mrs. Czermak. It was perfectly absurd, but she would. She thought every woman had designs on him. . . . He sighed. . . .

"It's been a very comfortable place," he said. "I should be sorry to have to leave."

"Yes," said Dr. Zerneck tartly, as she poured the coffee, "a man with a fond mother and sisters does get in the habit of letting women-folk wait on him. Sugar?"

"Black, please," he said, flushing. Had she heard of Monica's bringing him his morning coffee? But that wasn't his fault! They had all insisted on it. He couldn't have refused without being rude. . . .

"I'll stop scolding you," she said, handing him the cup. "How is your work going?"

"Not brilliantly, I'm afraid."

"Well, the adoption matter ought to be settled soon, and then you can settle down to a normal life."

Something in her tone made him ask: "What, ex-



actly, is your idea of a normal life for me, Dr. Zerneke?"

"Well, I don't mind saying that it isn't hanging over a cradle in your spare evenings. You ought to be having some kind of ordinary social life. You ought to be making friends. Men friends and girl friends. If I heard that you were caught drinking and dancing, I wouldn't be shocked. Even if you were seen kissing a pretty girl. I know, this may seem precipitate to you. You've only been mooning over your baby for a week. Just the same, it's time you began to form other habits.—Your habits would be admirable enough, if you were a husband, and one of those girls your wife. That's how a home is built up. But you are a bachelor. And you ought to behave as such. It would be bad enough, the way you're acting, if they were your own mother and sisters. I want you to snap out of it. . . . The truth is that something fell on you three weeks ago, and hit you like a ton of brick. Nevertheless, you've got to get over it. You can't let time stop still for you at the moment when you found you had a baby. After all, staying in the cave and cooing to babies is a maternal occupation. Going out and killing bears is the paternal job. How long, if I may ask, are you going to work for thirty dollars a week? Or is your son going to be supported by his grandfather?"

Norman set down his coffee cup and rose haughtily.

"I'm sorry my conduct doesn't please you," he said. "Thank you for your advice. I will call on you when I want more of it."

And so saying, thoroughly outraged, he left Dr. Zerneke's home abruptly.

## CHAPTER IX: It Was Bound to Happen

**T**HAT was on Friday evening. And on Saturday morning he had a telephone call from Dr. Zerneke.

"I've heard from Isabel," she said. "The papers are signed. If you can get off this afternoon to go to the courthouse, the thing will be settled for good."

He would be at her office at two, he said.

The legal red-tape would soon be unwound, now—his son would be all his own! . . .

Going back to his desk, he found a note there, saying formally that Mr. Wilkins wished to see him.

He walked buoyantly into Mr. Wilkins' office, thinking to himself that this would be his promised raise.

"My luck is with me!" he said to himself.

Ten minutes later, he came out of Mr. Wilkins' office saying to himself over and over:

"Of course. It was bound to happen. I've had too easy a time. It was bound to happen."

He had in his hand an order on the cashier for his week's pay, and another week's in advance.

Mr. Wilkins had observed his work carefully, he said, during these two weeks. Not everybody had the makings of an advertising man in him. He felt sure that Mr. Overbeck would do better in some other field. Et cetera.

Fired!

He tried to persuade himself to take it lightly. After all, there were other advertising agencies in Chicago. He had got this job without any experience at all. With what he had picked up of the lingo of the profession, he ought to be able to get a better job. Yes, he was no longer a mere beginner. He would strike the next place for sixty-five dollars a week at least. . . .

While he felt that way, as soon as he had cleaned up his desk and got his money from the cashier, he walked over to the H. H. Warner agency and asked for a job. He did not get it.

Then he tried the Simpson agency. There was nothing there for him, either.

Well, it had taken him some little time to get that first job. It would take more than a day to get another. . . . And in the meantime he had to go to see Dr. Zerneke.

What an irony! That it should be at such a moment that he should be given his son!

With Dr. Zerneke, in her office, he was stiff and formal. He had decided not to tell her about losing his job—until he had found another.

She wasted no words, but pushed a document across her desk.

“That is the mother’s consent. And here”—she glanced at another paper, and handed it over—“is your petition. Sign it before a notary, and take it to Judge Hummel in the County Court, at three

o'clock; our legal representative will be there. His name is Starrett."

"Thank you."

He took his departure stiffly.

There was a notary's office down the street. He had noticed it in coming. He stopped there, signed his name, and held up his hand while the notary mumbled a formula.

At the courthouse he found Mr. Starrett waiting for him. They went into Judge Hummel's chambers. The judge looked at him curiously. It was not every day, it seemed, that a man adopted his illegitimate child. . . .

It was over at last. And now to look for a job.

But no—he must wait till Monday for that. . . .

He would have nothing to do over Sunday except think.

He remembered what Dr. Zerneke had said about the child's being supported by his grandfather. It was as if she had known he was going to lose his job. . . .

It was true that he had been slack at his desk all week. Not like the week before, when he had been living by himself, and calling up Dr. Zerneke's office once a day to see whether the baby was all right. . . . He had been working for his son, then. Ever since he had come to Mrs. Czermak's, he had been lapped in a soft, sentimental dream of fatherhood. . . .

He realized that he had had no lunch. He must eat, even if he was out of a job.

He went home early in the evening and picked up a book to read, to keep his thoughts off his situation. He had decided he would say nothing to the people here about losing his job. Not until he had got another. He would go out early in the morning as usual, and keep looking for a job all day. . . .

The book was one that had been in the room when he rented it, a novel of Dumas'. He had read it when he was a boy. He started to read it again, with the hope that in this cheerful swashbuckling romance he would find something to take his mind entirely away from his problems. It was about Athos—and, as he presently noted, about an illegitimate son of that worthy. And Norman vaguely remembered, from his boyhood, the story of how it had all come about. The young man had found upon his doorstep a bassinet containing the newborn child—a souvenir sent by a young lady of quality in memory of the jocund night of love which they had enjoyed the year before. So, it appeared, were such matters handled in those romantic days. And, as Norman remembered, the young hero had suffered no pangs of conscience; he had taken it as a matter of course, and sent the child away to be nursed and educated. Such, as well as Norman could remember, were the origins and early circumstances of the Vicompte de Bragelonne. . . .

Norman threw the book aside fretfully. Dumas

had played him false—had merely reminded him of his own troubles. . . .

He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. Time for the feeding. But he did not want to go to see it. . . . He would feel ashamed, knowing that he had lost his job. . . .

What was it that Dr. Zerneke had said about the clock stopping for him? When he found that he had a baby. Yes, he hadn't thought of much else since then.

When Dumas' hero found that bassinet on his doorstep, he didn't moon over it. He took it in his stride. . . .

Well, when he had another job, he would begin to live what Dr. Zerneke called a normal life. He would make friends. He would meet girls. He would not hang over his son's cradle every evening. He would be a normal young bachelor. . . .

But first he had to find a job—and work hard to keep it this time.

What a fool he had been, to lose that job! It might be hard enough to get another. . . . But he wasn't going to let his son be supported by J. J. Overbeck. . . .

There was a knock at the door. It sounded like Mr. Victor's. He ignored it. And Mr. Victor took the hint of his silence and went away. But presently there came another tap that sounded like Monica's. He ignored that, too. He sat slumped in his chair, thinking of his inadequacies. He was



sitting thus, with his head drooped on his chest miserably, when the door opened slightly, and Monica's voice uttered a surprised and apologetic "Oh!"

Norman did not look up even then. For he became aware of the tears of self-anger and self-pity in his eyes. He did not want this girl to see him crying.

But girls are stupid about such things. She stayed there in the doorway, and said "Oh!" again, this time in a sympathetic tone. Then she came timidly into the room, approached him, touched his arm with her hand. "Please—is anything the matter, Mr. Overbeck? Have you—have you had bad news from Colorado?"

She stooped over him in a kind sisterly way.

Colorado?

"No!" he said. And he added roughly: "Go away and leave me alone!"

She fled.

He shouldn't have said that, he thought regretfully. She wasn't his sister, to be talked to in such a fashion. She had a right to ask—she had thought his wife was dying or something. That was what any one would think, to see him sitting there crying.

Stricken with remorse, he went to the door.

"Monica!" he called, for she was not in sight.

She appeared abruptly at the head of the stairs.

"Yes, Mr. Overbeck?"

"I—I'm sorry, Monica," he said.

"Oh, it's all right."

She was coming down. She stood there before him, with a queer frightened look on her face.

He didn't know that he was holding out his arms to her in the doorway. He didn't know until she melted into his clasp, and they were kissing one another.

"Oh!" she said at last, "we mustn't do this. Your wife—"

"Of course," said Norman, infinitely astonished at himself. "I forgot!"

There they were, in the doorway; and at the head of the stairs, as they both suddenly became aware, was Monica's mother. They released each other abruptly. Monica ran out into the hall. Norman closed the door, and sat down to think.

Now what?

He couldn't imagine why he had done such a foolish thing.

Fortunately, he was supposed to have a wife in Colorado. Monica wouldn't expect him to marry her.

But what would her mother say?

He wasn't left long in doubt. A firm rap at the door was Mrs. Case's. He rose to let her in.

## CHAPTER X: Mrs. Case

"I'M very sorry, Mrs. Case," he began, but she interrupted him.

"That's all right," she said, "you would be, caught as you were, and I'm not worrying about what's past. It's the girl's fault as much as your own, and natural enough on both sides, with small blame to either of you. It's the days and nights to come I'm thinking of. A man with a wife away is bound to be kissing some girl, and if it's not one it will be another, so another it shall be. We've trouble enough in our family, and it will be some other than my Monica that you philander with from now on. I'm not blaming you, Mr. Overbeck, you understand, but the way it is, with you a married man, I'll just ask you to find another room, and take temptation out of harm's way."

"It's very kind of you to look at it in that way, Mrs. Case," said Norman, much relieved. "I'll move to-morrow.—I don't know how it happened," he began to explain.

"Oh, I know how it happened," said Mrs. Case. "There was you, and there was she, and that's how it happened. I'm not saying a word against human nature. I can't have it go on in *my* house, that's all. I'll be sorry to see you go, but you know how it is. I

can't be staying awake all night to see that my daughter sleeps in her own bed."

Norman blushed. "I assure you," he said, "that we—that I—"

"You can save your assurances for your wife when she comes back, it's then you'll need them," said Mrs. Case. "I know the world of men and women, and I've no great quarrel with the way they're made. It's all right with me, but you can just be leaving your door unlocked at night for the other girl at your new place, when it comes to that."

Norman, not quite following her meaning, asked in bewilderment and some indignation:

"What other girl do you mean?"

"Whatever one it chances to be, and I wish you good luck, too," said Mrs. Case. "There'll be one. You're not the sort of young man the girls will let sleep single long, but I'd rather, as I say, it would be some other woman's daughter that kept you company when the lights are out."

"Really, Mrs. Case," said Norman in embarrassment. "You mustn't think—"

"Oh, it's only human nature," said Mrs. Case, "and nothing to apologize for. I think none the less of you, but I have to look after my own as best I may."

"I think you're quite right, Mrs. Case," said Norman.

"We'll all miss you, I say, and we'll all be glad to see you when you come to visit your boy. You

mustn't think we've any grudge against you, Mr. Overbeck. That's why I'm asking you to go now, before that happens which we'll all be sorry for."

There was more to the same effect, and it was arranged that Norman should find another room and move to-morrow, on the excuse that he had to be nearer to his office.

It was just as well all around, thought Norman; he would take a cheaper room while he was looking for work. He paid Mrs. Case two weeks in advance for the baby; that at least was secure. . . .

"I don't mind saying I'll sleep better when you've gone, and I don't have to wonder is every creak a girl's bare feet on the stairs," she said, at which Norman blushed again.

Was *that*—he wondered when she had gone—what everybody in this house thought of their brother-and-sisterly friendship? . . . Well—that kiss hadn't been very brother-and-sisterly! After all, what did he know about himself? Or Monica? Perhaps this brassy-tongued old woman was right. Anyway, he gathered that these reflections upon his character were not intended by Monica's mother as uncomplimentary.

As he went to bed, he glanced at the lock on his door. Yes, perhaps it was just as well he was going to leave this place. . . . What did he really know about girls?

## CHAPTER XI: Paradise Lost

ON Sunday morning he found a small room on the North side, not far away, a narrow hall bedroom on the top floor—a hole in the wall that cost him only four dollars a week.

He went back to Mrs. Case's to pack up. Mr. Victor came in. He had heard, he said, that Norman was leaving.

Nobody else came in. They seemed to be avoiding him.

He asked Mr. Victor to tell Mrs. Case that the corner expressman would come for his trunk. He looked around the room regretfully, and wondered again at that inexplicable kiss which had forfeited for him this comfort. . . . Well, unless he got a job right away, he couldn't have stayed there anyway.

"Say good-by for me to Mrs. Case, and Mrs. Czermak—and Monica," he bade Mr. Victor. "Tell them how grateful I am and always will be to them, for the way they've looked after my child."

Mr. Victor raised his eyebrows. "But you'll be coming here regularly to see the boy, won't you?" he asked.

Norman felt rather foolish. To Mr. Victor, of course, it was not a farewell to a lost paradise.

"My work is going to keep me terribly busy for

a while," he said stiffly. "I shan't be able to get here very often."

"You've been almost one of the family," said Mr. Victor regretfully.

Just a little too darned near, thought Norman. . . . That kiss still astonished him whenever he thought of it.

But he didn't like to go away as though he were sneaking off in disgrace. He wished he could see Monica for a moment. . . . An idea occurred to him.

He unlocked his trunk. In the till were all sorts of trifles which his mother had collected from his chiffonier. He searched among them, looking for something appropriate. . . . Yes, girls wore cuff-links sometimes. He selected a handsome green jade pair with silver mountings.

"May I entrust you with a little commission?" he asked Mr. Victor formally. "I would like you to give these to little Monica."

"She'll be pleased as Punch," said Mr. Victor, admiring them.

"I don't know when I'll be here again," said Norman, "so I'll say good-by," and shook hands with Mr. Victor.

He went over to his new room and awaited the trunk. He was afraid at first that there would be no room for it. But he found that if it were set at the end of the narrow iron bedstead, it left space enough for the door to open half way—and that



was enough. . . . He reflected that if the worst came to the worst, all those suits of clothes his mother had sent him ought to fetch something at a pawnshop.

But that was no way to be thinking at a time like this. . . .

He dined as inexpensively as possible, and came back to his hole in the wall. . . . At Mrs. Czermak's there had been a tree in front of the house. Here he looked out over a chaos of grimy roofs. Well, he might as well get used to it! This might be his life for some time now.

All the rest of the day he stayed in his tiny room. He remembered that he had promised Dr. Zerneke to write to his mother. But he did not want her to come while he was out of a job. He would have to postpone that indefinitely.

Well, what was he going to do? Look for a job, of course. But suppose he couldn't find one?

But he could. He would. He must!

He hadn't been discouraged when he started in to look for a job three weeks before. But this was different, somehow. Being a father, with a baby to support—that had been then a strange dream, a daring wish, a rebellious aspiration. Now it was a grim reality. He had to keep on paying that twelve dollars a week. . . . And he began with pencil and paper to figure out how long his money would last, computing his own expenses at the lowest rate. Less than three weeks! Scarcely more than two, in fact.

He had that much time to find a job in. Then there was that trunkful of clothes to pawn. . . . Of course, his father's money was there in the bank, waiting for such emergencies as this. But that would be a confession of failure. . . .

Why was he thinking of failure now? Three weeks ago he hadn't worried about that possibility. . . . But three weeks ago he hadn't just been fired from a job that he thought he was doing pretty well at.

Yesterday he had formally adopted his and Isabel's child. He, a man without a job, who could assure a child no more than three weeks' food and shelter. What would Isabel think, if she knew? Would she be sorry she hadn't given her baby to some well-to-do strangers?

He found it difficult to get to sleep that night. The future stretched out before him, grim and frightening.

## CHAPTER XII: Out of a Job

**H**E had intended to get up early Monday morning; but a troubled sleep, filled with a long, anxious, childish dream concerning an attempt to find the right train in a huge and bewildering railway station, held him fast in its grip. Apparently he was waiting for Monica's knock to awaken him. But no knock came, and it was ten o'clock before he opened his eyes. A bad start! He would have to get an alarm clock.

He called on an advertising agency that day, and was not surprised to be told that they needed no one.

The rest of the day he spent in an aimless wandering about the streets.

The next day, again rising late from the enthrallment of an anxiety-dream, he called on another advertising agency, and again used his further time in meaningless perambulation. The fact was that the experience of being refused a job robbed him of his courage for the rest of the day. And in addition there was a half-conscious conviction of the hopelessness of his search, which made him want to stretch out the effort over a period of days or weeks, and postpone as long as possible the inevitable conclusion of failure. . . .

What occupied his thoughts during these long days was a monotonous series of trifles which had assumed for him a heavy and grave importance. One, which took all week to decide about, concerned the buying of an alarm clock. He certainly needed one—there was no doubt of that. He was rising later and later from his poisonous fear-dreams. . . . But a clock cost money. He looked at clocks in the windows of drug stores as he passed, noted their prices, and figured out in his mind how many hours of his money the cheapest of them would set him back. For he had his money computed now in terms of hours. Every dollar, as he had calculated it, gave him and his child eight hours and some forty-eight minutes of food and shelter. A forty-five cent clock might seem cheap enough, but it robbed them of four hours' security! And figured in that fashion, its cost was so stupendous that its purchase must be postponed and reconsidered pro and con at great length.

Again there was the matter of his meals. He had for this period set down the meager sum of fifty cents a day for food. That had seemed small enough, but when one ate only two meals a day at very cheap restaurants it was possible to cut down that figure. He could get a breakfast of doughnuts and coffee for ten cents, and a dinner of hash or spaghetti for thirty. The consideration of these items, and the sense of saving occupied much of his time and thought. . . . And yet, after a few days,

when he came to balance his budget one evening, he found that he had spent more money than he should have done. Two dollars, or seventeen hours and a half, had vanished without trace. . . .

And there were items he had not reckoned on—cigarettes he could do without (he smoked a kind that went out, and he saved the stubs of his last box and had a luxurious puff or two from one of those before going to bed), but laundry was a necessity; and so, after butchering his face with his last dull blade, was a new supply of blades for his safety razor; though the soap on the washstand was as good for shaving, he found, as what comes in a tube. And even the small item of carfare seriously disarranged his estimates; at a minimum of ten cents a day for three weeks, it shortened his time of security by nineteen hours. And he had quite forgotten about having to pay for laundry.

In truth, he knew these estimates were an absurd folly; yet he spent hours of time every evening going over his figures, working them out in decimals. There was this comfort in his preposterous mathematics, that it kept his mind precariously balanced on the edge of the abyss of fear along which he seemed to walk. It was as if he must keep his eyes fixed upon these figures, lest he should look down into that gulf and become dizzy. . . .

He did not go to see his child; he could not face the people there—yet. He called up every evening, and Mrs. Case or Mrs. Czermak reported that the

baby was—of course—all right. Once it was Monica who answered the telephone; in a queer, constrained voice she gave him the information he wanted, and then, still in a reserved tone, thanked him for the cuff-links. (He had forgotten them.) He explained that he was very busy, but hoped to have time soon for a visit. . . .

Every day that week he went to an advertising agency. There were only two, besides the one from which he had been discharged, where he would have cared to work; one of them he had gone to last Saturday, and the other he held in reserve, going first to the smaller and negligible ones. On Saturday morning he would go to McCullough's, the one he was holding in reserve.

That day he rose early, having bought an alarm clock at last—recklessly paying seventy-nine cents for it. He indulged in the luxury of having his shoes shined. He bought a newspaper, and read about the preparations for the General Strike in England, and the sports news, so as not to be too out of touch conversationally with the outside world. Thus prepared, he went to McCullough's.

Mr. McCullough himself was not in, but somebody in charge told him flatly that there was no opening there just now for anybody. . . .

That afternoon, when going into a cheap restaurant to brace himself with another meal of doughnuts and coffee, he noticed a sign in the window: "Dish-

washer Wanted." He went up to the man at the cashier's desk and asked about the job.

The man looked at him doubtfully and said: "I don't think it's the kind of a job you want."

"How much does it pay?" asked Norman.

"Go and see the boss. He's in the back."

"Whom shall I ask for?"

"Ask for the boss."

Norman went back into the greasy, steaming kitchen.

"I want to see the boss," he said to a fat man in an apron.

"I'm the boss. What do you want?"

"How about that dishwashing job?"

The man looked at him. "My God, what next?" he said disgustedly.

"Why, what's the matter with me?" Norman asked.

"You'd last about an hour," said the man.

"How much is the pay?" Norman demanded.

"Twelve dollars and meals. You have the day shift for two weeks and then the night shift—seven to seven."

Twelve dollars—and meals. That was enough for the baby. And he could pawn his trunkful of clothes to pay for his room.

"I'll take it," he said.

"If you're here at six-thirty to-morrow morning and nobody else has turned up, I'll try you out," said the man.



"All right," said Norman. "I'll be here."

"The hell you will," said the man doubtfully.

As Norman went by the cashier's desk the man there asked: "Get it?"

"I think so," said Norman.

"Working for a paper?" asked the man. "Going to write us up?" And he smiled knowingly.

Norman shook his head and went out. Why were they so suspicious of him? Just because of his clothes? Well, a week's dishwashing would change that. . . .

He would have no time to call up Mrs. Czermak to-night. He'd better call up now.

Monica answered the telephone.

"Oh!" she said. "Dr. Zerneke wants very particularly to see you to-night. She said to go to her home at ten o'clock. Yes, Junior's all right. When are you coming to see him?"

"Soon, I hope," said Norman vaguely.

What did Dr. Zerneke want to see him about? Had she found out about his losing his job?

## CHAPTER XIII: The Dreamer Wakes

**D**R. ZERNEKE was not in when he arrived at her home at ten o'clock, and he let himself in as before.

Waiting for her, he turned to the book-shelves. He caught the name of Freud on the back of certain imposing volumes. . . . Ferenczi. . . . Flexner. . . . Frazer. . . . Fabre. . . .

All very informative, no doubt. . . . Sanger. . . . Spencer and Gillen. . . . Stendhal's *L'Amour*. . . . Stopes. . . . If he read all those large books, he might understand his own situation better. But it was a little late to begin his education. Perhaps a younger generation, that babbled of sex and psychoanalysis instead of nursery rhymes, as it was reputed to do, would find clear sailing. And maybe not. He had thought he knew something, himself. He had had a smattering of modern ideas. He had thought of himself as a liberal.

Goethe. . . . Godwin. . . . Groos. . . . Remy de Gourmont. Guyot's *Breviary de l'amour experimentale*. . . . All about sex, it seemed. . . . Janet. . . . James Joyce. . . . Ernest Jones. . . . Jung. . . . Kammerer. . . . Kempf. . . . Ellen Key. . . . The Koran. . . . Krafft-Ebing. . . . An omnium gatherum of biology, sociology, psychiatry,

poetry, plays, and what not. . . . Adler. . . . Grant Allen's "The Woman Who Did"—a novel Norman vaguely remembered having read in his 'teens; it was about a woman who deliberately and on theory had an illegitimate child; the child, as Norman recalled, did not thank her mother for conferring upon her that heroic but embarrassing distinction. . . . Aretino. . . . The Apocrypha. . . .

Norman took down the Apocrypha, and looking into it at random was interested to see there the name Thecla. He had wondered who was the St. Thecla for whom the Adoption Society was named. He would read the Apocrypha some time and find out. . . . He put the book back at the sound of some one coming up the stairs.

Dr. Zerneke entered, and greeted him cordially.

"Well, Mr. Overbeck," she said, "I suppose you are feeling pretty good about everything?"

Norman was disconcerted.

"What about?" he asked suspiciously. Was she making fun of him?

"Why, you have your son," she said. "That hasn't palled already, has it?"

"Oh," he said. "I thought—"

"You thought what?"

"I hadn't intended to tell you," he said. "But the fact is, I've lost my job."

"That's too bad," she said sympathetically. "As a matter of fact," she added, "I knew."

"Oh! you did?"

"Yes. I happened to call up Wilkins and Freeman, and they said you weren't there any more."

"Of course. . . . It was foolish to think I could keep it a secret."

"You haven't another yet, I suppose?"

"No," he admitted. "I've been looking for another all week without any success. I—I seem to have lost my nerve. I'm frightfully discouraged. To tell the truth, I took a job of dishwashing today."

"Dishwashing?"

"Yes. So as to keep up my payments to Mrs. Czermak, while I'm looking for a real job. . . . Oh, things will turn out all right, I know, but this week my prospects haven't looked so cheerful. It was something of a shock, losing that job at Wilkins and Freeman's. And looking for a job and being turned down every day—it's hard to keep up one's courage."

"So now," Dr. Zerneke commented, "you know how a good many other young fathers feel. Well, it may be good for you."

"It may take me, of course," said Norman, "several weeks to find another job."

"Or several months, even," said the doctor. "Do you know Mr. Victor, at Mrs. Case's rooming-house? He's been out of work since New Year's."

"How do they keep up?"

"Some of them don't. Others have a little money

put by for hard times. When you were a prosperous lawyer, didn't you save anything?"

"I had a bank account, yes."

"Why not draw on it, then?"

"It's not really mine, any longer, since I've quit the firm."

"Suit yourself. But I hope you're not going to be silly."

"I've broken with my life in Vickley. I'd rather stay broken—not go back for help. Is that so foolish?"

"Are you engaged in some private quarrel with your father? Or are you trying to make a career for yourself here in Chicago? If your son, when he grows up, goes to New York to look for a job, don't you think he will need some money to live on before he gets started? Of course, you can do dishwashing jobs in cheap restaurants if you want to. It may be good for your soul. But I doubt it. I think you're ashamed of having lost your job."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"Shame is a luxury no sensible person can afford. Do you want to stay in the advertising business?"

"I do. Very much. That's really what I'm afraid of—that I'll have to fall back on something else."

"Would you consent to let me do you a favor?"

"Why not?"

"I thought you might be too proud. Well—first of all, how much money have you in the bank at Vickley?"

"Of my own—something like a thousand dollars. I was going to spend it on my honeymoon."

"Write out a check for it and deposit it in some Chicago bank. How much are you paying for your new room?"

"Four dollars a week."

"Rent a small apartment. You can get one, furnished, for the summer, in this neighborhood, for fifty or sixty dollars a month. Give my name as a reference. You will need such a place to entertain your family in, anyway. Do that Monday."

"And what then?" Norman asked curiously.

"You are fond of buying pictures, aren't you?"

"I've confined myself to etchings, chiefly. I have a small collection of moderns in Vickley."

"Send for them. Or go to the galleries and buy something new that you'll want to put on your walls. Do that on Tuesday. Also, go to a department store and buy some cups and saucers or hangings that please you. Do you dance?"

"Yes."

"I will send you tickets for a ball next Wednesday, for which you will please remit ten dollars. If you don't find a girl to take, come alone, and I'll introduce you. It's a masquerade, but evening clothes will do."

"Is that all?" Norman asked grimly.

"Thursday I leave to your own devices. And on Friday go to see Mr. McCullough, of the McCullough Advertising Agency, and ask for a job."

"I was in there this morning. They haven't got a job to give me."

"They will probably have one next Friday."

"Why should they have one next Friday?" he asked suspiciously.

"Because there is such a thing in this wicked world as 'pull,' and I use unscrupulously the little I have for the benefit of my friends. How do you suppose people get jobs?"

"But what do you know about my ability?"

"Nothing. After you get the job, it will be up to you to keep it. That's not my affair. All I promise you is a two weeks' trial. But it just happens that the last young man I rashly recommended to Mr. McCullough turned out to be pretty good. If you're a flop, I'll merely lose my reputation for intuition, that's all. Only, if I were you, I'd ask for sixty a week to start on. They'll not respect you otherwise. Remember that you've a baby to support. . . . And don't, please, be angry at me for keeping you from conquering the world by your own unaided efforts."

"I'll be everlastingly grateful," he said. "But—I thought poverty was supposed to be an incentive. Evidently you don't think so. Why should you want me to pretend to myself that I'm rich?"

"Because you've always been well-to-do. You are, still, as a plain matter of fact. Your poverty is a fake poverty—a neurotic lie, to please yourself."



"It didn't feel so to me. It seemed real enough. And it wasn't at all pleasing!"

"It was an exercise of your imagination, nevertheless. A dream. I've merely waked you up."

"It was a nightmare," he said.

"A grim little poetic fantasy. Write a poem about it, and send it to the Daily Worker. It will all be true enough—for others. Not for you! Be honest about this, if you can."

"I admit I feel better than I did when I came in. But why—aside from the job you've more or less promised me—why should the *facts* seem different now? Because they do!"

"You're facing realities now. Not fighting shadows any more. The question isn't whether you can conquer the world with your bare hands. It's merely whether you can succeed in the advertising business. Maybe you can't, you know!"

Norman laughed, and thanked her warmly.

"Have you asked your mother to come to see you?"

"Not yet."

"Well, the sooner the better."

As Norman walked back to his room, he had a startling apprehension of the fact that what she had said about keeping a job was a really important truth. . . . There had perhaps been something grimly romantic about the thought of washing dishes and pawning his clothes to pay that twelve dollars a

week for his son's care. This problem of keeping a job after it had been given him—there was, he knew, nothing very romantic about that. It was a quite realistic problem that he had to face now. . . .

"Am I," he wondered, "a perfectly incorrigible ass?"

If it would help to do the things that Dr. Zerneke advised—if it would keep him from flying off on some preposterous new emotional tangent (he had Monica's kiss in mind) he would do as she said.

He would get an apartment. . . . And then he would ask his mother to come. . . .

BOOK THREE  
The Dominant Sex



## CHAPTER I: Vita Nova

**H**IS mother was coming. He had wired, inviting her, and she had wired back the date of her arrival. . . .

Ten days had passed since his talk with Dr. Zerneke, and in the meantime he had done most of the things outlined in her program. He had transferred his bank account to Chicago. He had rented a good-sized furnished apartment on the North side for the summer. He had even, according to instructions, picked up an etching, a satiric thing by Peggy Bacon, and put it on the wall, to make the place more his own. . . .

He had in other respects dutifully carried out Dr. Zerneke's commands, day by day. He had obediently gone to the dance for which she had sent him tickets (he thought of taking Monica, but rejected that idea as distinctly out of place); and rather to his surprise, he had found on that occasion that he was capable of enjoying himself like anybody else. . . .

And finally, with some uneasiness and considerable doubt, he had applied to Mr. McCullough for a job—and had been taken on at forty dollars a week, which was all he had the nerve to ask.

He ought, he knew, to feel at ease now, in his

comfortable apartment, and with his new job. But he had lost his sense of security. His experience of being out of a job had taught him something he could not so quickly forget. Some time he might be able to feel again that the world was made for him; but it seemed still a difficult and dangerous place, and he a somewhat helpless stranger in it. He was determined not to lose his new job. Never did a young man work at his tasks more earnestly and humbly. . . .

He had been to Mrs. Czermak's to see his son twice in those ten days—formal visits, different enough from the warm intimacy of his former association with the family. He felt under constraint, and so did the girls. Monica was distant and resentful, though she was rather obviously wearing his present—the cuff-links.

Well, at any rate, he was being sensible. With his mother coming to see him, he must not get involved in any more messes. But he felt a little guilty about Monica. . . . It wasn't quite the thing to do to kiss a girl and then drop her cold. . . .

When he was settled in his apartment, and at work on his new job, with no further excuse for delay, he had wired his mother the invitation to visit him. Her answering wire had said she would arrive Sunday morning; and this had been followed by a letter, a friendly and casual letter, taking everything as a matter of course. And Doris had scribbled a postscript saying that she'd love to see the baby.

. . . Lucinda, it appeared, was still suffering from "nerves." He gathered that she had taken it all pretty hard. . . .

And there had been a letter from Gilbert Rand, giving him the town gossip. They were still talking about him in Vickley. Nothing like that had ever happened there. . . . Considering everything, Norman thought it was pretty sporting of his mother to be so calm and matter-of-fact about it.

Nevertheless, with the approach of his mother's visit, he began to feel a sense of filial constraint. His new apartment was associated with the thought of her visit: it was not so much his own place, as one in which to entertain her. He felt that with her visit he would lose the liberty he had gained in leaving home and coming to Chicago. And he began to regret more keenly the pleasures of his stay at Mrs. Czermak's, and to recall the delightful details of that period—the friendly midnight chats with old Mr. Victor, the morning coffee brought by Monica, and the delightful half hours with the girls in the nursery. Even Mrs. Case's Rabelaisian conversation was something which he missed with regret. . . . Mrs. Case had not felt any of the constraint which had marked his visits since his departure from her roof; and last Sunday, when he had seen his son bathed, she had in her frank way commented upon one feature of the baby's anatomy which is usually avoided in polite conversation. "Ah!" she had said, addressing the baby, "little do you know, young



man, how much trouble you're going to make in the world with that!" A realist, she. . . . Norman grinned, remembering.

He had lived there only a week altogether. And he had been rather longer than that installed here in his apartment. Yet that week would always live in his memory, full of warmth and color and homely sweetness. This week in his apartment had been merely barren.

Sitting there in his living room, he looked about with a vague dissatisfaction. Polite comforts evidently did not suffice a man. The fact was that he was lonely. . . .

And his mother was coming in four days.

He really ought to make the best of those four days. . . .

## CHAPTER II: Waste Not Your Hour

**Y**ES, he was lonely, that was the trouble. Dr. Zerneke had told him to make friends. But he had made friends already, and had had to drop them. . . .

Well, he must make some new friends.

He took out his memo-book, in which he had written the names, addresses and telephone numbers of two girls he had met last week at that dance.

They had been very interesting girls. One of them was a field-worker for some sort of agency which looked after delinquent children; she had snapping black eyes and curly black hair, and she had talked very interestingly about her work, in the intervals between dances. Her name was Jennie Michaelson; a very intelligent girl, whom he had been eager to know further. And she liked him. He wondered that he had let so long a time slip by—more than a week—without calling her up. He looked at his watch. It was only eight-thirty. She might be in from dinner, and they could go to a restaurant and talk. She lived on the West side. . . .

He hesitated, at the moment of going to the telephone, and sat there in the big chair beneath the bridge-lamp, looking at his memo-book. There was

another new girl in it somewhere. Louise—he couldn't remember her last name: a fine, healthy, lovely blonde, and a wonderful dancer. Yes—there she was: Louise Van Strohm. She was a student at the University of Chicago, majoring in biology. It was her idea of adventure to go around the world and down into deep seas seeing strange and curious forms of life, like Will Beebe. She would, too, some time, she said. She lived near the University. She was fond of music, and the concerts in Jackson Park were commencing. She had mentioned it herself. There was one to-night. Or they could go somewhere and dance—better still! He looked at her 'phone number. . . .

Again he hesitated, wondering whether what he most wanted to do was talk or dance. If he wanted to talk, Jennie would be the more interesting; if to dance, Louise danced like a dream. It was difficult to decide which girl he most wanted to see to-night. . . .

He sat there in his easy chair under the lamp, trying to decide between Jennie and Louise.

The clock on the mantel chimed the hour of nine.

Of course, he had no assurance that either Jennie or Louise would be in at this hour. Girls had other things to do with their evenings than sit around in a furnished room waiting for the 'phone to ring—especially girls like these. It was no way to go about it, to call them up at that hour. Girls had to be dated up beforehand. He'd be a fool

to think he could get them at a moment's notice. In fact, he should have dated them up for some evening there at the dance. By now they had forgotten all about him. After all, if a man asked a girl for her telephone number, and then didn't call up for a week, she would naturally conclude that he couldn't be very much interested in continuing the acquaintance. It would be rather embarrassing to call up now. . . .

And if he did go to see one of these girls, what would he say to her? A year ago, at college, he'd have known what to say. But he was a thousand years older, now. Louise was twenty, Jennie twenty-two; Dr. Zerneke had told him their ages. They were only kids. He didn't know how to get along with girls of that age any more. . . .

To be sure, he had got along with them well enough that night at the dance. But that was because of the stimulus of the music, the costumes, and the drink or two that everybody had under his and her belt. But to see these girls again in cold blood . . . His spirit faltered at the frightful difficulties of talking to a strange girl. . . .

Well, no doubt it could be done. People did, somehow, get acquainted with each other. . . . And his imagination flew on to envisage a time when he and these girls might be better friends. . . . The trouble was, it would be awkward to be always pretending to have a sick wife in Colorado. Maybe they wouldn't want to play around with a man who

had a sick wife in Colorado. Of course, he could be a recent widower, if he preferred. Or a divorced man—one whose wife had run away: that was near enough to the truth. . . . And he speculated upon just what Jennie and Louise would think of a young divorced man with an infant child. When they knew him better, they would ask to see the baby. Girls seemed to be interested in babies—almost all girls. They might like him none the worse for having a baby. . . . But there was the rub. He couldn't ever tell them the truth about that baby. There would be always an invisible barrier, in his relations with them, from the very beginning. It would spoil any friendship he might try to have with them. . . . Things would come up in conversation about illegitimacy—things like that did come up in conversation with girls nowadays!—and he would have to hide his own thoughts. Because he couldn't go around telling everybody his story. And he would be ashamed of having to treat these girls as if they were enemies from whom his thoughts must needs be concealed. Their friendship would be a farce from the outset. . . .

The clock chimed the half-hour.

It was really too late to call up those girls to-night. Besides, he didn't want to go out. He wasn't in the mood for girls. He would stay at home and read a book.

He went to the book-case, took one down at random, glanced through its pages, and threw it aside.

After a few restless turns up and down the room he abruptly put on his hat.

It was too beautiful an evening to stay indoors. He would take a walk in the park.

He found himself accidentally on the street where he had lived at Mrs. Czermak's. . . . He walked past the house, looking at the lighted windows. His old room was dark. Had they rented it to somebody else yet? He hadn't asked, and they hadn't told him. . . . The upstairs room, next to the nursery, showed a glow of light at the edges of the curtains. That was the girls' room—Rose Czermak's and Monica's. . . .

What did Monica think of him?

He turned, and walked back, on the other side of the street, looking at the house.

He could make some inquiry about the baby, as an excuse for coming. Yes, he hadn't told them that his mother was coming. He ought to do that. He halted. . . . No, it wouldn't be very sensible to go to see them in his present mood. Monica might be there. Better let well enough alone. . . . He could telephone them about his mother. . . . He went on. . . .

Walking through Lincoln Park, he reached the Lake front. The full white moon was lifting itself out of the waters of the lake. He stood and watched it. . . .

What was Monica doing?

But he reminded himself that he was supposed to

have a sick wife in Colorado. Monica wouldn't be thinking of him. Besides, to a girl nowadays, a kiss meant nothing. She had doubtless forgotten all about it.

And besides, his mother was coming in four days. He had best keep out of trouble. . . .



### CHAPTER III: His Mother

**I**T was Saturday evening. His mother was coming in the morning. Norman looked anxiously about his apartment, and spent an hour emptying ash-trays, picking up cigarette stubs from the hearth, and getting his bureau drawers in order. He found that he had forgotten to send off his laundry this week. Well, he could buy some new shirts on Monday. . . .

He sat down, seeing his apartment with his mother's eyes. She would probably find fault with the work of his cleaning-woman. She would smile when she saw that bureau drawer full of bright chintz which he had bought for curtains, forgetting that there was nobody he could ask to sew them for him. . . . Mrs. Case, it was true, had asked if there was anything they could do to help him get settled in his new place. But he couldn't have asked them to make his curtains. . . .

He had telephoned Mrs. Czermak to let her know that his mother was coming, and would probably be over to see the baby in the morning. The news had seemed to upset her. . . .

Well, there was nothing else to do to-night. He would read a while and then go to bed and get some

sleep. His mother was arriving on the early train. . . .

He had happened to see a copy of the Apocrypha in a bookshop window, and had bought it out of curiosity, to see who St. Thecla was. But for some absurd reason that apocryphal girl saint had reminded him in a perverse way of Isabel. He did not want to be reminded of Isabel. . . . Tonight he opened the book, read a little of the story of Thecla, and fell to wondering about Isabel. She had been going to sail for France on the eleventh. That was four days ago. (It was curious what a perfect calendar his mind unconsciously was in these matters: it was four days ago that he had bought this book, too.) Was she on shipboard now? Or had she impatiently gone long before, and was she in Paris at this moment?

Not that it made any difference to him. . . .

But he had a queer troubled dream that night, in which both Isabel and Monica figured—Isabel as a dim figure in the background, hiding her face, and Monica, warm and near and dear, holding out her hands to him appealingly. . . .

The alarm clock sounded. . . . In an hour he must meet his mother at the station. An hour. Then he could go on sleeping for five minutes longer. . . . He wanted to finish that dream. . . .

He was awakened by an insistent ringing of the door-bell, and sprang up in confusion, looking at his watch. Good heavens!—he had overslept nearly

two hours. . . . Was that his mother now? He threw on a dressing-gown and went to the door.

"Mother!" he cried out contritely.

"Good morning, Norman. You always were a sleepy-head." She kissed him. "It's nice to see you, my boy."

"And I didn't meet you!" He seized her suitcase and packages. "How awful of me! Come in!"

"That was all right," she said. "What a nice place you have. As a matter of fact, I was rather glad you didn't come. I went over to see the baby."

"Oh! You did?"

"Yes. He's a very nice baby, Norman. He looks exactly like you."

"You—you liked him?"

"Of course. Now, Norman, go and have your bath and get dressed, and I'll get some breakfast."

"I'm sorry, Mother—I'm afraid there's not a thing in the house."

"I brought everything. I stopped at a delicatessen. Go along, I'll find the kitchen. You're still half asleep. You need a good cup of coffee."

It wasn't quite the way he had expected it to be. . . . But then, nothing ever was, he reflected as he hurried through his bath and into his clothes. She had simply and calmly walked in and taken possession. . . .

"Are you almost ready?"

"Yes, Mother. In three minutes."

He could smell the appetizing odors of bacon and coffee.

"All right. I'll put the eggs in."

That was just like her. . . .

He felt half admiring and half resentful of such a mother.

## CHAPTER IV: 'Ware Women

**A**T breakfast, when Mrs. Overbeck had satisfied herself that her son's stomach was being properly ministered to, they talked—Norman with some caution and embarrassment, but she with apparent ease. It gave Norman a queer feeling. One would not have thought from her manner that there was anything unusual, let alone irregular, in his situation. She inquired briefly and casually about Isabel (whom she referred to quite familiarly by that name, instead of by any hostile circumlocutions), and Norman was relieved to find that he need not make any further explanation in regard to her. His mother appeared to take Isabel's going to Paris for granted. . . . She commented on Mrs. Case and her daughters. "They seemed rather flustered at my visit," she said. "They are all very fond of the baby," she added. "Yes, they are," he said.

"By the way," she remarked, "they asked me something about your wife's health."

To be sure—he hadn't warned his mother of that protective fiction.

"Oh," he said, "I'm supposed to be married, you know—on account of the baby. I told them I had a sick wife in Colorado. You didn't say anything that would give me away, by any chance?"

"Why, no, I think not. I didn't discuss you with them. I just pretended not to notice the question, and went on talking about the baby. But you might have told me, Norman. You didn't write me anything. All I know is what Dr. Zerneke has told me."

"Oh—you've seen Dr. Zerneke too?"

"Not yet. I mean what she wrote to me."

He might have known. Doubtless his mother and Dr. Zerneke had been in correspondence about him all along. He seemed to sniff a maternal conspiracy.

"What did she say about me?" he demanded.

"Oh, just that you were well, and about your work."

"What did she say about my work?"

"She said you'd got a new job that paid more money. I was glad to hear that. I didn't see how you could live on thirty dollars a week in Chicago."

She hadn't known, then, about his losing that other job. He felt relieved.

"How is Lucinda?" he asked. He had already inquired about the other members of the family.

"Well, you know how Lucinda gets—in a state of nerves over every little thing. Her new puppy is lost."

"What!"

"Yes, the new one she got from Schwartz's. It just got out of the house about ten days ago and disappeared."

"I remember. It had a black spot or something."

So Gilbert Rand was mistaken! It wasn't concerned with him and his baby, Lucinda's state of nerves. Only her dog—of course. . . .

"She's thinking of coming on while I'm here."

"No!" said Norman in helpless protest.

"Oh, well, you might as well let her, Norman. There's plenty of room here. And your baby will take her mind off her lost puppy."

"Oh, then, by all means let's have her," said Norman ironically. "If my baby can assuage her grief—!"

His irony was lost on his mother—as usual. "Yes," she said, "I think it would do her good."

She had brought along her sewing-kit, and after breakfast sat down to do the curtains, which she had somehow already discovered in his bureau.

"Now don't let me interfere with your usual program," she said. "Just go ahead and do whatever you want to do. And don't let me keep any of your friends away."

He didn't like to tell her that he hadn't made any friends. . . . Really, he ought to bring somebody home, or she would think he was hiding them from her. . . . He might bring Charlie Beckett here some evening. Charlie was the only one at the office that he knew at all. . . .

"I really don't know many people yet," he confessed. "I've been so busy. I did get acquainted a little when I was living over at Mrs. Czermak's



place—but that's about all. And of course there's Dr. Zerneke. I've invited her to go out to dinner with us to-night, by the way."

"Yes, I'd like to meet her. And now go on out somewhere if you want to. These curtains, and the dishes, will occupy me till dinner-time."

"But I can't have you washing my dishes, Mother," said Norman, scandalized.

"It won't be the first time I've washed your dishes," she said.

"I'll do them myself," he said. "You're my guest."

"Don't be silly, Norman. Run along and leave me alone here for a while."

And after some feeble protest, he did. . . . He went over to Mrs. Czermak's.

"Well," he asked her, "what do you think of my mother?"

She looked at him in a frightened way.

"Tell me," she begged, "is she going to take the baby away?"

"Take the baby away!" Norman echoed. "Why, of course not!" And then he added, wonderingly: "I never thought of—such a thing."

No, but now that he did think of it, it didn't seem so impossible. If she wanted to, she would be hard to stop.

"Why, did she say anything—when she was here?" he asked.

"It wasn't what she said. But I'm afraid!" said

Mrs. Czermak, and led the way to the nursery. She lifted the sleeping child from his bed and held him close in her arms. "I don't want her to take him away!" she said.

"Oh, well," said Norman reassuringly, "I'm sure she hasn't any such idea."

But that evening, at dinner with his mother and Dr. Zerneke in the quiet restaurant he had selected, he was troubled by that thought. . . .

Well, wasn't it what he had once gone home to propose?—that she take his child to raise! . . . Yes, but that was ages ago. It was the last thing in the world that he wanted, now, to have his son brought up by his family in Vickley.

He was a little shocked to realize how much he had changed his mind, in the last six weeks. . . .

And another thing, that evening at dinner, bothered him—the sense that his mother and Dr. Zerneke were already too well acquainted—that Dr. Zerneke was her friend and ally, rather than his. . . . There was an air of implicit secret understanding between them—an understanding concerning him.

What were these two women up to?

Yet it was the first time they had met, and they were of such different kinds! They were only trying hard to be polite to one another. All they had in common, after all, was a feminine conviction of his masculine helplessness when it came to babies. . . .

## CHAPTER V: As Usual

WHEN Norman's mother had been there less than a week, he had settled down to a somewhat fretful but unprotesting acceptance of her presence. She had got him an efficient cleaning woman; she had sewed buttons on his shirts, and bought him a needed supply of socks and handkerchiefs. She waked him in the morning to the kind of breakfast he had always had at home. It was no use trying to regard her as a guest. She slipped easily into the familiar, authoritative, useful and neglected rôle of mother. . . . When Charlie Beckett, at the office, suggested to Norman one day, as one bachelor to another, that they have dinner and go to a musical comedy together that evening, he called up his mother and said he wouldn't be home till late—leaving her alone with no more thought than if he had been at home in Vickley.

(One incident may be lightly touched upon. Norman was not much of a drinking man, but in Charlie Beckett's genial company, at the place where Charlie took him to get some real old-fashioned beer after the show, he drank enough to become rather tearily and beerily confidential; though even then he presented his troubles in a somewhat fictional disguise. "M' wife ran away. Lef' me with a baby. Nice little kid, too!"—something like that, and so unlike

Norman in his sober senses that he preferred to forget it. . . .)

His mother had written to Lucinda telling her she could come Saturday. "Just for a few days," she explained to Norman. . . . She herself had not said how long she was going to stay; but on Monday she had brought home from the station a second suitcase which she had checked there on her arrival, and he guessed that she intended to remain at least a fortnight. Well, there was nothing to complain of, surely, in this; he had invited her to come—and he couldn't say that she was in his way. She did make him comfortable. Nevertheless her motherly presence secretly and unreasonably irritated him. But that was no new thing, either. He had been secretly irritated at her for the last several years. . . . So that everything was much as it had always been.

Once, only, there flashed into his mind the curious tale that Gilbert Rand had told him about his father. He hadn't exactly doubted the story—he had taken its truth for granted; but in a certain sense he had not really believed it. How can one believe such things about one's parents? He wondered, now, if his mother had guessed what was going on? And if she had guessed, had she sat there calmly, sewing buttons on her husband's shirts, knowing that he would get over what ailed him sooner or later? Or had she never dreamed of such a thing? It was hard to make his mother out—impossible, now, to tell what she knew or thought. . . .

She saw the baby every day, and one evening they went together. If her alien presence exercised a constraint on Mrs. Czermak and her family, she appeared placidly unaware of it. She was friendly enough with them; they were formal with her—still suspicious, it seemed, of her intentions regarding the baby. Norman was ill at ease too, during this visit. . . . And thereby occurred a second and still more disturbing incident in Norman's relations with Monica.

It was a rainy evening, late in the week, and he had 'phoned for a taxi to take them back home. As they were getting into the taxi, his mother remembered that she had left her bag in the nursery; and he went back to get it. Monica found it for him, and came down to the door with him. It was the first time they had been alone together since that night of the kiss, and they were both embarrassed. Doubtless it was this embarrassment which provoked him to a silly speech. As they passed the door of his old room, he remarked: "I suppose you're bringing morning coffee to somebody else now?"

She looked at him reproachfully, and they halted outside the room. "Do you think so?" she said. She turned the knob. "See—it's still empty—waiting for you to come back." And somehow or other they were there together in that empty room, with the door slowly swinging shut behind them. As it swung shut, the shadows closed in and obliterated the light from the flickering gas-jet in the hall. In

the darkness Norman's hand touched Monica's hungrily. And this time he was not suprised that next moment they were in one another's arms.

No, he was not surprised. Monica no longer seemed to him a child. And he knew that he wanted this—her arms about him, her kisses on his mouth. He wanted it all so much that he couldn't think of anything else at the moment.

"Darling!" he whispered.

Then, in the darkness, she whispered to him: "I can't stand it, Norman! I want you too much! I don't care if you *are* married! . . .

"Now you know!" And her mouth passionately met his again.

"Do you want me?" she whispered.

And what could a young man answer but—

"Yes, of course I do!"

"Then come back and live with us again—and don't let her take the baby away!" she whispered pleadingly.

"We'll talk about it later," he said, half brought back to sanity by this alien note . . . half aware that this was all mad folly, until her kiss dizzied his senses again. . . .

"You must go, now, dear," she said presently, pushing him gently out.

"Good Lord!" thought Norman, as he ran down to the waiting taxi.



## CHAPTER VI: Night Thoughts

**H**E could not get to sleep for a long time.

Of course, he could not take Monica's proposal seriously. They had both been a little mad. She hadn't known what she was saying. She didn't really mean it. He couldn't take advantage of a young girl's romantic emotions. It would be simply too caddish. . . . The best thing to do would be to ignore the incident. Yes, the next time they met he would just behave as though nothing had happened. No doubt she would be grateful and relieved. . . .

This mood of chivalry lasted for perhaps three quarters of an hour, when abruptly his thoughts took another turn. He had a sudden vision of her looking at him with scornful eyes. Women didn't appreciate that kind of masculine chivalry. It would hurt her pride, and she would despise him. . . .

Well, what could he say to her? Not, after their kisses to-night, that he didn't really care for her that much. . . . It would be a lie. . . .

Well, if he felt that way, why not take her up?

The trouble was that it was impracticable. He couldn't go to live there again. Mrs. Case would have something to say about that. She had foreseen this very situation. A realistic mother, Mrs.



Case. . . . No, it wouldn't do at all. Agreeable as Monica's proposal was, as a young man of the world he had to realize that it must be foregone. . . .

To be sure, he had this apartment. And after his mother had gone back to Vickley—

Yes, why not?

Monica, he told himself, was old enough to know what she was doing. He wasn't exactly seducing her. She had made the offer herself. And he would be a fool to say no. . . .

He played in imagination with the idea, and it was infinitely alluring.

Of course, he must not let Monica enter into this relationship with any false romantic ideas of its seriousness. He would have to make it clear to her that it was just—well, a temporary and passing sort of thing. . . .

If Monica were older, and had had more experience in the ways of the world, she would take all this for granted. But that was not the case. And the thought of making these explanations to her was not very pleasant.

As a matter of fact, it would all be terribly serious to her. She would be committing a sin, for the sake of their love. Because she thought he was a married man. . . . It was hardly fair to her. . . .

But if he told her the truth, she would want him to marry her. . . .

That, of course, was entirely out of the question. The deception would have to be kept up—or else,

for that idea didn't please his imagination, he would have to make clear to her why he didn't want to get married. . . .

He could imagine her saying reproachfully: "You mean—you don't want to get married to *me*!"

Well, all right, take it that way. He supposed he would get married some day. But he had no intention of doing so for a long time. . . .

"But why don't you want to marry me, Norman?"

What could he answer to that? He might say that this wasn't really love. . . . But she would indignantly deny that. And she would be right, so far as she was concerned. It really was love, with her. . . . And what was it with him? He remembered how he had walked up and down in front of her house, wanting desperately to go in and see her. . . . If he had felt that way about a young woman of his own social class, would he have doubted whether it was love? . . . Yes—that was why he was subjecting his emotions to so brutal an inquisition: because she was a stenographer and the daughter of a woman who ran a rooming-house! That was why he must not permit himself to think of this as love! Madness, folly, a young man's casual amusement, a convenience, a chance not to be passed up—call it anything but love! But what was the truth?

He wanted her. He liked her. He was happy in her presence. He thought about her all the time . . . the curve of her mouth, the tilt of her

chin, the steady look out of her eyes, the way she tossed back her bobbed hair, the smoothness of her arms, the poise of her young body—he knew these charms by heart. . . . Wasn't that love?

Oh, not so romantic and poetic as some sorts of love, perhaps. But it was real. Oh, it was real enough!

And yet he didn't want to marry her.

Well, and why didn't he? Simply because she wasn't the sort of girl he had ever thought of marrying. Because she was a stenographer. Because her mother ran a rooming-house. Because her family was poor. Because she had none of the airs and graces of his own familiar middle-class world. . . . And because he was an Overbeck of Vickley.

Perhaps it *was* mere snobbishness. . . . But still—could he and a girl of such a different background get along together as man and wife?

That, however, implied that he still belonged to Vickley. He reminded himself that he had actually left all that sort of thing behind him. He wasn't his father's son, any more. He could marry anybody he liked. . . . And what could be a more appropriate wife for a struggling young man of uncertain prospects than a girl like Monica, able to take care of herself and make the best of narrow circumstances? It wasn't at all a question of her fitting into his world, but of his fitting into hers! And the

answer to that seemed to be the fact that he had been very happy living there at her house. . . .

He hastily summoned up in his mind the differences between them. Her lack of education. . . . He was interested in art and ideas, in abstractions which she would never be able to understand. . . . Not, indeed, that most girls cared much for art and ideas; but at least some girls knew how to talk about them. . . .

It did not seem to him, just now, to matter greatly. After all, one did not marry a wife for the sake of intellectual conversation. And Monica was no goose, either. She had a sensible little head on her young shoulders. And her own struggle with poverty had taught her what life was. . . . When she knew the truth about his child—she wouldn't be shocked. . . .

His mother might not like such a match, but she would have to accept it. . . . He was running his life to suit himself, not his family. . . . If he and Monica could be happy together, what else mattered?

Abruptly there flashed into his mind what his friend Hal would say about such a marriage. "*Nostalgie de la boue.*" He had always chaffed Norman with having a common, earthy streak in him—just because, before he too had fallen under the spell of Hal's ethereal inamorata, he had entertained a sufficiently realistic college-boy passion for a pretty young waitress in Boston. . . . Well, his affair with

that girl had probably been healthier than his and Hal's mooning over that art-struck vixen Isabel. . . . Homesickness for the mud? Possibly. If he hadn't been an Overbeck from Vickley, he'd probably have married that waitress back in Cambridge. It was shame at finding that he couldn't take that affair as lightly as the young-gentlemanly code demanded, that had made him break off with her. He had never told anybody but Hal how he really felt about that girl; and Hal had only laughed at him. But she had given him a taste of simple, earthy young love, reckless and sweet; and it was the memory, somewhere in the back of his mind, of her unhesitating and passionate surrender, that had made him so afraid of Monica. Well, he had been his father's son at Cambridge; he couldn't marry his waitress sweetheart. But he could marry Monica now—if he was really free from Vickley. *Nostalgia de la boue?* Say rather homesickness for the honest, fragrant earth! In Isabel he had had enough dealings with the unattainable stars; and in his Vickley fiancée, with the middle region of respectable compromise. . . .

Vickley would hear about his marriage with Monica, of course; and Vickley would think it a final degradation. Vickley would take it as his surrender of any hope of ever making good and coming back. Well, let them! He did not want to go back to Vickley. And if marrying Monica prevented that, so much the better!

There was nothing about Monica's family that he really need be ashamed of. They were self-respecting, hard-working people. He had liked them all. . . . Something Dr. Zerneke had said, when she was scolding him, came into his mind: "If one of those girls were your wife, your behavior would be admirable." Well, why shouldn't Monica become his wife?

Yes, why not tell her the truth and ask her to marry him?

But he would rather wait until his mother had gone back to Vickley. . . . And it wasn't a thing to be decided on impulse. He would take the rest of the week to think it over. . . .

A week to think it over. . . . And he fell asleep to dream of happiness in Monica's passionate young arms. . . .

## CHAPTER VII: A Letter

**H**E was unusually gay at breakfast, and went whistling to his office. . . . Of course, he must not tell Monica just yet; but he might manage a reassuring touch or word when he went in the evening with his mother to see the baby. . . . His imagination was busy with thoughts of their life together. . . .

But something happened that day to disturb the happy tenor of his thoughts.

In the afternoon there was a telephone call from Dr. Zerneke.

"I've just had a letter from Isabel," she said.

"From Paris?" he asked.

"No. From Michigan."

"But I supposed she had sailed a week or more ago!"

"It seems that she hasn't. And this letter concerns you. In fact, it's really intended for you. I'm sending it special delivery to your apartment. It's something you'll probably want to discuss with your mother."

"But what in the world—?"

"You'll find out when you read her letter." And that was all she would say.

What could Isabel have to say to him? She



hadn't decided that she wanted to keep the baby after all? Girls, he knew, did sometimes change their minds about such things. But it was too late—the baby was his, now. And it was going to stay his.

But he did not allow himself to think about it. He was working with Charlie Beckett on the Pearson account—an important job—and it needed all his attention. Charlie seemed to like his ideas. . . .

"Here's a letter for you," said his mother, when he came home that afternoon.

"Oh, thanks," he said. "Something from Dr. Zer-neke."

He went into his room, tore open the envelope nervously, put aside Dr. Zerneke's accompanying note, and glanced rapidly through the sheets covered with Isabel's tiny handwriting. . . . But it was a long and prolix letter, and this rapid survey told him nothing, so he dropped into a comfortable chair, lighted a cigarette, and began it again at the beginning in a more leisurely manner:

"Dear Dr. Martha—

"I've delayed my sailing for a few weeks, because I seem to need a longer rest before my ocean trip. I should have taken your advice and stayed another week in the hospital, I realize now. But I expect to be all right in another week or so.

"In the meantime, since signing over the baby to Norman, I've had plenty of time to think about it, and I feel that perhaps I ought to make a suggestion. You will, of course, use your own discretion in pass-

ing it on. If it's out of place, please throw this in the wastebasket and forget about it.

"I hadn't, of course, realized that Norman was as much interested in the baby as all that. When he didn't come to see me at the hospital any more, I thought he had gone back to Vickley and dropped the matter entirely. It was really quite a shock to get those documents. I saw that I had done him an injustice. (It really makes me a little ashamed of my own lack of the proper parental instincts. Norman and my baby! It seems very odd, and rather sweet. He will make a nice father.)

"I feel awkward about making my suggestion. Not knowing anything about any other plans he may have, I can't be sure my idea is not an unwelcome impertinence. If the girl in Vickley, the one he was engaged to, is going to marry him anyway and take the baby, then of course you won't say anything to him about this. But Roberta writes me that he is living in Chicago now, so perhaps the Vickley engagement is all off.—You see, I'm very much in the dark about it all. You didn't tell me anything; and I suppose it's really none of my business. But it occurs to me that it may be almost as embarrassing for a man to have an illegitimate baby as for a girl. And I can't forget that under those circumstances he was generous and considerate enough to offer to marry me. I appreciated the offer, but since I wasn't going to keep the baby there was no reason for accepting it. But now that he has the baby, per-

haps I ought to make him a similar offer. It would be, of course, and you must make that clear to him, only a legal fiction for his and the child's benefit. I would go on to Paris immediately, and he could divorce me for desertion; or if he wanted the divorce more quickly, so as to marry somebody else, then I could get a divorce in Paris as soon as I had established my residence there. And as a divorced man he would be in a less awkward position about the baby. I only make it as a suggestion.

"I tried to paint when I first got here, but gave it up. I shouldn't have attempted any work so soon. But it was a reaction from the hospital atmosphere, and the sense of being a failure when my milk gave out—I wanted to do something I was equal to doing. But I shall have to wait a while longer—Art is off me for the present. The truth is, I feel discouraged. But in Paris, I know, it will all come back.

"I keep wondering about Norman and the baby. I had no idea he was going to be such a Tolstoian saint, and atone for the sin of his youth in that fashion! And did his family throw him out when the scandal broke, the way mine did? You might tell a fellow something about it all! Anyway, if my suggestion should be accepted, I'll be glad to stop in Chicago for a day on my way to New York, and fix it up accordingly with him.

"I'm not trying to thank you for all you've done for me—you and St. Thecla. I'll try to say it with

paint in Paris. I hope Norman won't take too long to decide, so I can have it off my mind and go with an easy conscience.

"Faithfully yours,  
"ISABEL DRURY."

Norman laid down the letter and whispered bitterly to himself:

"She can go to hell!"

## CHAPTER VIII: A Sociological Interlude

**D**R. ZERNEKE had suggested that he would want to discuss this matter with his mother. But that was just what he did not want to do.

"I've something to attend to," he said. "Would you mind going to dinner and to see the baby alone this evening?"

"Of course not. I'll get myself a bite right here. Just run along."

He hurried out, saying that he would be back late that evening.

He tried to get Dr. Zerneke on the telephone, but she was not in. Probably she would be, he reflected, at ten o'clock. He would go around to see her then.

He did not want to go back to his apartment. His mother would notice his nervous manner, and wonder what was the matter. (Though she never asked any questions—that was one comfort.)

He walked in Lincoln Park for an hour or two. What he felt like doing was to sit down and write Isabel a cold and decisive rejection of her proposal. He framed and re-framed that letter in his mind. In one of the versions it went like this:

"Dear Isabel—Thank you for your kind offer. You had your own reasons for rejecting mine, and I

have mine for rejecting yours. I wish you success in your artistic career. Sincerely yours."

Another version ran: "Dear Isabel—I have no desire to be made respectable. Your offer is declined."

As a matter of fact, none of these versions were as epigrammatic as he could have wished, or did anything like justice to his feelings.

He was, of course, at a disadvantage. She had not addressed him directly. He might write an informal letter to Dr. Zerneke, and ask her to send it on. It might begin: "Dear Dr. Zerneke—You tell me that Isabel Drury has offered to marry me, in order to simplify matters in regard to my child. Well, a great deal of water has flowed under the bridge since I made a similar offer to her. In the meantime I have the child, and the marital farce seems quite unnecessary." Something as casual and unemotional as that. . . .

But he ought to talk to somebody before he wrote to her. Not his mother—no. And Dr. Zerneke was the only other person he could talk to about it.

Would she urge him—he wondered suddenly—to accept Isabel's proposal? For the sake of the child? That had been her reason for everything so far. His own feelings were never considered in the least. . . .

Of course, marriage with Isabel *would* (along with his acknowledgment of paternity) legitimate his son, according to the laws of the State of Illinois.

He knew that. He had looked it up at the Crerar library. In California, subsequent marriage of the parents wasn't necessary for legitimation; the child would be legitimated simply by his taking it into his home and treating it as if it were legitimate. In New Mexico a process in court sufficed. In New York, on the other hand, under English common law, subsequent marriage did not legitimate the child—though perhaps the original relationship could be legally construed as a common-law marriage. It was all helter-skelter and ridiculous—like the divorce laws. But he happened to live in Illinois. It *would* make a difference.

He wondered why his father hadn't suggested it. . . . He had known, of course, that Isabel had refused. Had he taken that as final? It wasn't like him, to let anybody's wishes stand in the way of what he thought correct and proper. There must have been some other reason. . . . To be sure, now that the scandal was out, marriage with Isabel wouldn't make the thing any more decent in the eyes of Vickley. But it would settle the legitimacy question. His son could never be called a—— Norman choked on the word even in his thoughts. . . .

Irrelevantly and bitterly, he reflected that it might have been kinder to his son to let him be adopted in the first place by some married couple. He would never, then, have known the secret of his birth. He would have considered himself the son of Mr. and Mrs.—— whoever they were. . . .



But no, he would have found out, some time. And then he would always have wondered who his real father was. . . . Yes, and his mother, too, of course. . . .

It occurred to Norman that he mustn't let his son grow up with a resentment against his mother for deserting him. A story would have to be concocted that wouldn't hurt his feelings. . . . Norman remembered what Gilbert had said that time—about hypocrisy. Yes, that was the way it started. Well, there was a good deal to be said for hypocrisy, after all. It made things so much simpler.

He looked at his watch. He hadn't had any dinner, and it was nearly nine o'clock. That was silly. He would go and get something to eat.

But instead, he went to the Crerar library.

Some people, in their troubles, solace themselves with drink, others with statistics.

Besides, Norman was a lawyer—or had been. What he had so far seen of the legal attempts to deal with the problems of illegitimacy only reënfirmed his secret contempt for Law. But in his recent reading he had come across approving references to recent legislation in Norway and Sweden, by which children born out of wedlock were given, entirely or almost, the same rights as others. He was thumbing over the card catalogue looking for information on this Scandinavian Utopia, when he came upon the title: "Marriage Laws in Soviet Russia."

"Well, let's see how the Bolsheviks handle this

thing," he said to himself, and turned in a slip for the pamphlet.

He glanced through its pages rapidly. Ah! Section 133. Note I. "Children descending from parents who are not married have equal rights with those descending from parents living in registered marriage." He read on. Section 140 required an unmarried woman who becomes pregnant to give notice to the Bureau of Vital Statistics "not later than three months before the birth of her child," together with the name and address of the father. Section 141 provided that upon receipt of the notice, the Bureau should issue a citation upon the man named, who would have two weeks in which to deny paternity. Further sections dealt with the court inquiry by which paternity should be established. The man held liable as father was to be held responsible for his share in the expenses of gestation, delivery, and maintenance of the child. . . .

Norman felt a little disappointed. This did not seem so frightfully revolutionary. A court process to determine paternity was no new thing in the history of the world. He remembered one in Vickley last winter—he had gone to Magistrate Cooley's court out of curiosity. A girl had charged a neighboring storekeeper with being the father of her child. Under cross-examination she broke down and confessed that it was really not he but a young fellow out of a job. She wanted a father for her child who could support it properly. . . . Norman won-

dered if things like that happened in Soviet Russia. Human nature being what it was, he didn't see why not!

He turned the pages of the pamphlet idly, and his glance rested on this passage: "160. Children have no right to the property of their parents, nor parents to the property of their children. 161. Parents shall be bound to provide board and maintenance for their minor children and for children who are indigent and unable to work." That reminded him—in Soviet Russia, he had heard, there was a different kind of economic system, which left nothing much for anybody to inherit. That, of course, would simplify this whole matter of legitimacy. It was in order to protect the inheritance rights of the legal family that illegitimate children had been so cruelly penalized the world over. He remembered a lecture to that effect at law school. And these Bolsheviks weren't concerned with defending property rights. That was the real difference between Moscow and Vickley. If there weren't any inheritance rights involved, there wasn't any reason to deny their human rights to children born out of wedlock—nothing to make a fuss about at all!

But he wasn't living in poverty-stricken and revolutionary Russia. He was living in prosperous America, where the legal family had property rights to be defended against the claims of bastards. That was, it occurred to him, the real reason why he was now an outcast from Vickley respectability. If men

were permitted to do what he had done, what would become of the Family, in its legal, sacred, property-inheriting sense? It would mean red ruin and the breaking up of close-corporation homes, to be sure. . . . And his father—Norman could appreciate now the old man's grim idealism—he was battling stubbornly against his own respectable Vickley world, attempting to bring his grandson into that close corporation in spite of a bar sinister. . . .

“Board and maintenance”—that was all that Norman himself, set adrift from family protection, could seriously hope to offer his son: that, and his mere paternal love and companionship. He had no longer any illusions about the possibility of any great success in the advertising business—he would do well if he hung on to his job. And that was all he really wanted to give the boy, if the truth were told—an upbringing, and then freedom to make what he wanted to of his life! But J. J. Overbeck could offer his grandson the prospect not merely of a legal career, but of lordship in the small town of Vickley: a snug income from rents, mortgages, government bonds, and steel securities—and, with these, pride and power.

Which would the boy choose?

But at two months of age, the boy had no choice. Norman had to choose for him. . . . He might make it easy for his father, by marrying Isabel before she sailed for France. That, of course, was

what Dr. Zerneke would want him to do. For the child's sake.

No!

He would be damned if he would marry that girl—to make his son one of the little lords of Vickley.

He looked up at the library clock.

Five minutes of ten.

He would tell Dr. Zerneke that there were limits to what a father should be asked to do.

## CHAPTER IX: On Taking a Girl at Her Word

**D**R. ZERNEKE was in when he arrived, and the coffee was steaming.

"How is your mother enjoying her visit?" she asked, pouring him a cup.

"All right, I guess." He drank his coffee at a gulp. "Well, I've read Isabel's letter. . . ."

"Yes?"

"I want to know what you think."

"What does your mother say?"

"I haven't asked her. . . . And I'm not going to."

Dr. Zerneke shrugged her shoulders. "I really don't want to get mixed up in this," she said.

"But you can tell me what you think!"

"And be blamed afterwards. . . ."

"I've got to talk it over with somebody!"

"There's your mother," she reminded him.

"But you know Isabel, and she doesn't!"

"Well, the only thing I feel like advising you is—not to do anything rash."

"Such as what?"

"Such as taking Isabel at her word in a hurry, without having a chance to think it all over."

"You don't want me to marry her?" he asked, in surprise.

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"I don't care whether you marry her or not. That's entirely up to you."

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," he said. "I thought you'd say I *ought* to do it."

His relief was so plain that she went on, with a smile: "We don't advise girls, in similar circumstances, to marry the fathers of their children—not, I mean, just to be made respectable; I should think the same considerations would apply to a man. After all, you've gone through the worst of it, now."

"Of course," he said, "it isn't just me. Marrying her would serve to legitimate my son—and nothing else, in this state, will."

"That doesn't matter so much," said Dr. Zerke. "In fact, I don't think it matters at all, the way things have been arranged. It's a mere legal quibble. Socially speaking, an illegitimate child is one whose father does not give him his name, support and protection. Your child is very well provided for in all those respects. He's merely lacking a mother. But that is scarcely a reason for your marrying Isabel, when there are other girls in the world."

"Then what *would* be a reason for my marrying her?" he asked.

"If you were in love with each other, that would be a fairly good reason," said Dr. Zerke.

Norman laughed, a little grimly. "Then it's entirely out of the question," he said. "Because we're not. Not in the least. Besides, that isn't the prop-



osition to be considered. She says very plainly in her letter that it would be only a matter of legal form. A marital farce, she calls it. We would never live together. She would go on to Paris, and get a divorce."

The argument was not going quite as he had expected. In fact, it was almost as if he were arguing in favor of Isabel's plan.

"You would be quite willing that it should be only a matter of form?" Dr. Zerneke asked.

"I certainly shouldn't think of trying to persuade her to make it a real marriage—if *that's* what you mean!"

"You wouldn't?"

"Of course not. We talked all that out, the time I went to see her at the hospital. She doesn't want to be a wife and mother."

Dr. Zerneke opened a drawer and took out a sheet of paper. "I came across the report of our psychiatrist on her," she said, "and had some of it copied. Would you like to see it? It might amuse you. We go about these things in a very scientific fashion nowadays."

He read the typewritten sheet.

"*Case H 15278. Unmarried mother who refuses to keep her child.*

"*Report of Dr. A. B. Fishwanger, psychiatrist (extract):*

"Her feeling of hostility toward maternity is thus

accounted for as a repression of the psychic conflict originating in her father-complex, and expressing itself in her artistic ambitions. She is convinced that if she allowed herself to accept the full rôle of motherhood, she would never get a chance to be an artist. Something might undoubtedly be said for this view on strictly realistic grounds. But it would be truer to say that if she allowed herself to become interested in her child, she might stop wanting to be an artist. This is what she is really afraid of. If her child had been born in wedlock, she would probably have rebelled a little at her fate, and then settled down, as the saying goes, and become a sufficiently devoted mother. But she has deliberately managed the affair so as to keep what she calls her freedom.

"A thorough analysis, lasting over several months, would probably be required to resolve her psychic conflict, which appears to be of a very deep-seated nature. (To this conflict is probably due, in view of the absence of other findings, the premature drying up of her milk.) A briefer analysis might have some considerable value, but on account of the resistance of the subject even this is out of the question."

"Can't you imagine Isabel being interviewed by that psychiatrist?" said Dr. Zerneke, smiling. "I must say I rather sympathize with her. Still, it does throw some light on her psychology."

"I suppose she was in a state of conflict about it," said Norman. "Still, she made up her mind.

You don't think anything has happened to change it?"

"I think she's probably in a very difficult situation just now. Undoubtedly she is finding out that she is more of a woman than she was willing to admit. Having a baby does something like that—it starts all the glandular secretions that create tenderness and devotion. She's done her best to fight those feelings down, but they're there. She can't escape them. After all, it's nothing unusual. Sometimes girls think beforehand that they are going to hate their illegitimate babies—but they generally don't. And it's quite the ordinary thing for a girl who has given her baby away to be sorry she's done it."

"But she doesn't say she's sorry," Norman objected.

"I think that might possibly be read between the lines."

"It never occurred to me. You think she wants her baby?"

"I can't pretend to speak for her. But that might be one explanation of her offer."

"Not if she were going on to Paris," said Norman.

"She might not go on to Paris, then."

"But she says definitely that she would!"

"No doubt she means it. But how do you know what would happen to you two young people after you get married? You both have families. They

would have something to say about it. You might find yourselves boxed up in a house together the rest of your lives. That's why I suggest that you think twice about marrying her."

"I see what you mean. But if I went up to Michigan and we were quietly married there—who would know about it?"

"All the newspapers in the United States, I expect. And your mother is here, as you seem to forget. You couldn't marry without telling her."

"I could make some business excuse for my trip to Michigan. She wouldn't know till it was all over, and Isabel on the boat. Then it would be too late for our families to interfere."

"Do as you please. But don't expect me to be surprised if Isabel comes back with you from Michigan to meet your mother."

"Aren't you rather cynical, Dr. Zerneke? I think I could trust her. I'm sure of it."

"I'm not suggesting that she has any intention of double-crossing you. That's not the point. If she came back with you it would be because you had invited her to."

"But why should I do that?" he asked coldly.

"You were in love with her once. And she's your child's mother. It would be the most natural thing in the world."

"You really think she'd stay with me if I asked her?"

"Do you really want her to stay? Then the only way to find out is to ask her. If that's what you want."

"It wouldn't really mean giving up her career," said Norman reflectively. "There would be time enough for that, later."

"It would be a decisive step, for her. I doubt if she'll have any career, if she marries you now. But that is her own lookout. It's nothing for you to worry about—except as it might mean having a discontented wife on your hands in Vickley."

"Why in Vickley?"

"Can you support a wife on your present job?"

"I suppose not. She'd have to work."

"Has she ever done any work?"

"You don't think I ought to marry her?"

"I'm not trying to run your affairs for you, Norman. But I think you ought to understand what you may be getting into. Isabel is probably feeling much more like a mother than an artist, just now. If you want to capture her, this is undoubtedly your chance. And in justice to her, I don't think you ought to accept her offer unless you are willing to urge her to make it a real marriage. But that is not a thing you can do out of mere generosity to her—nor is it really necessary to do because of the child. It all depends on how you feel about her. Do you want her as your wife?—That's the real question, Norman. I don't know how you feel about that."

Norman rose and walked up and down the room.

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"All this is new to me," he said. "I can't quite believe it."

"Take your time and think it over. Talk to your mother about it."

"That would mean taking the whole family into my confidence. I don't want any more family conferences. And besides, it's something that can't be delayed indefinitely."

"She won't go till she hears from you. I repeat that the only question is, do you want her for a wife?"

Norman kept on walking back and forth unhappily.

"She's treated me atrociously," he said.

The doctor smiled. "Now you'll have a chance to revenge yourself—by marrying her."

He paid no attention to that remark. "She doesn't deserve to ever see her baby again," he said bitterly.

And, after a moment:

"I ought to hate her!"

"And instead, it seems, you still love her?"

"Yes—damn her!"

Dr. Zerneke laughed.

"You think it's funny, do you?" Norman said indignantly.

"Promise me this," said Dr. Zerneke, "that you'll take a week to think it over."

"A week?"

Something clicked in his memory. He realized

that he had been going to take a week to think about marrying Monica. . . .

"Yes. Suppose you postpone your decision till next Saturday—or Sunday. And then tell me what you've decided."

"All right," he said meekly.

"Till next Sunday, then."



## CHAPTER X: Which?

**H**E walked in Lincoln Park for a while before going home.

That damned letter from Isabel! Of course it had upset him. . . .

Anyway, he oughtn't to put any confidence in Dr. Zerneke's guesses as to Isabel's feelings about marriage. He knew Isabel as well as Dr. Zerneke did—better! She was incapable of being in love with anybody or anything except her art. She meant just what she had said in her letter. If he married her, it would be a mere formality for the child's benefit. Nothing more. Why should he suppose the marriage would mean more to her? She had expressed herself plainly enough in her letter. Why should he give her an opportunity to insult him again?

She might be a little discouraged about her art just now—but it was all she really cared anything about. She wasn't human. She wasn't a woman at all. She was what Hal had said about her in a poem—she was a pixie . . . or a leafy shadow in the spring moonlight that seemed like a girl until one tried to clasp it in one's arms. . . .

Monica was real. Monica was a true flesh-and-blood girl. Monica could love. . . .

Why was he condemned still to be haunted by this ghost of his lost youth? Why couldn't he forget

her? Why wouldn't she let him forget her? How like her this letter was!—in offering a stone for bread. . . .

Even if in the discouragement of the moment she should agree to try being his wife, that would mean nothing. That marriage would be foredoomed to failure. She had said it herself, that day in the hospital. She would never really belong to him. He would be clasping her body, but her thoughts, her soul, would be far away, in a world he could not enter. . . . They would come to hate each other. . . .

Unless—unless what Dr. Zerneke said about her was true. . . .

But it wasn't true. He knew better than to believe that. . . .

It wasn't quite fair to Monica—to think of marrying her with that ghost hovering in the background. . . .

And if he were going to moon over Isabel all his life, he might as well marry her and be done with it. . . .

Perhaps he was so cursed that he would rather be miserable with Isabel than happy with Monica. . . .

He would have to give her an answer, one way or the other, soon. If he said "no," he might regret it all his life. . . .

If he said "yes," he was throwing himself into a whirlpool of doubt and misery. . . .

But he didn't have to decide right now. He ought

to get some sleep. He had a job to go to in the morning.

He entered the apartment quietly, so as not to wake his mother. But she came to his door in a dressing-gown, holding out a telegram.

"Lucinda's done such a fool thing," she said. "Look at this! And I don't want you to think it's my fault, because it's not."

He took the telegram. It read:

MADGE COMING TO CHICAGO WITH ME TO DO  
SHOPPING WILL BE AT ANNEX

"Madge!" he said in astonishment. "And with Lucinda?"

"Oh, yes—they're great friends now. You know the way Lucinda is. But she ought to have more sense than to bring Madge with her. And Madge ought to have more sense than to come."

"Well," said Norman, "I don't expect Madge to stay away from Chicago on my account. Why shouldn't she come with Lucinda, if she wants to?"

"You know perfectly well why," said his mother. "The shopping is only an excuse. Lucinda will take her to see the baby, and then somehow or other you'll run into her."

"Well, what of it?" said Norman irritably. "Why shouldn't we meet?"

"Don't talk like a fool, Norman. You know that girl's still in love with you!"

"No, I didn't," said Norman, disconcerted. "Is she, really?"

His mother did not consider that worth a reply. She went back to her room, saying as she went:

"Well, don't blame me, is all I say!"

"Good Lord!" said Norman helplessly.

## CHAPTER XI: As Luck Would Have It

**A** YOUNG man may expend anguished thought upon the question of which of two girls he ought to marry; but a third claimant breaks the spell of that dilemma. He no longer feels the sense of having to make a painful choice; his feeling is rather a bewildering one of having no choice at all. He loses in imagination the position of embarrassing masculine jurisdiction over the fate and happiness of the girls, and begins to feel a little like a hunted animal.

Abruptly, when left alone by his mother, the color of the whole situation changed for Norman. He felt as though a horde of women were closing in upon him. It was not a dignified situation, and in self-defense he felt a burst of resentment against them all.

What right had they to make demands upon him? They weren't any of them in love with him, really. It was their damned maternal instinct. Even Monica had talked about the baby in the midst of their love-making. . . . Everybody seemed to think that a man with a baby had to have a wife. . . . Well, he would show them. . . .

He fell asleep in a mood of profound hostility to all womankind, and when he awoke it was with the

grim resolve not to be bullied into marrying anybody.

That Saturday afternoon, when he came back from lunch, there was a note on his desk. He knew when he saw it afar what it would say. That Mr. McCullough wished to see him. . . . And it did. . . . "Fired again!" thought Norman.

He wasn't surprised; he had thought he was doing damn good work on that Pearson account; but evidently McCullough knew better. . . . And it was just the time when a thing like this would happen, with his mother and sister looking on. He couldn't keep it a secret from Vickley this time. . . .

But there was just one good thing about it: if he lost his job and became a bum on a park bench, maybe these women would let him alone. . . . It would be a good excuse; he wouldn't have to marry anybody. . . . Norman brightened, and went in cheerfully to get the ax from Mr. McCullough.

But Mr. McCullough, as he somewhat gradually and rather incredulously discovered, had not sent for him in order to fire him—only to tell him that he seemed to be getting along pretty well, and that he could consider himself a regular member of the staff from now on. "Your salary check will be for seventy-five this week," Mr. McCullough added casually. "And you can go on working with Charlie Beckett on the Pearson account."

"Thank you, Mr. McCullough," said Norman, gulping down his emotions. . . .

Of course, one couldn't be sorry that one hadn't been fired. . . . But it took away his one avenue of escape from the embarrassing situation in which he found himself. It left him with no good excuse to make to those three girls. . . .

Those three girls—that was the way he put it in his conscious thoughts. But in reality it was only one of them that he had in mind. Isabel would not care—he knew that well enough. And reckless little Monica—she had offered her love and demanded nothing. . . . It was Madge that he was afraid of. Madge—and Vickley.



## CHAPTER XII: The Fugitive

**A**S for Madge, he was determined to keep out of her way while she was in Chicago. . . .

Lucinda was at the apartment with his mother when he came home that afternoon. She had been taken to see the baby, and she expressed herself enthusiastically. Norman couldn't help being touched. He had never heard her talk that way even about one of her pet dogs. . . . He was on the alert to ignore any reference she might make to Madge. . . . But she said nothing about Madge.

At last, in impatience, he remarked: "I understood Madge was coming to Chicago with you."

"Oh, yes," said Lucinda, and went on talking about the baby.

Had Madge seen the baby? He was curious to know, but he was determined not to ask. . . .

Doubtless it was the part of a brother to show his sister about Chicago—take her to dinner and the theater, and so on. But when she had been so indiscreet as to come companioned by a girl he did not want to see, she would have to go without these brotherly attentions. He would let her look after herself.

Lucinda seemed not to notice that she was being neglected. . . . After all, she had been in Chicago before; and she was accustomed to Norman's brotherly indifference.

But Norman suspected a plot. How could he not suspect it? Lucinda's friendship with Madge, her bringing Madge to Chicago—doubtless she hoped to bring about a reconciliation. His mother, in spite of her protests, might be in on it. And so might even Dr. Zerneke. They all thought of him as a helpless male who needed a wife. It was all very well-meant—but he'd thank them just to leave him alone. . . .

To block any plans they might have for an "accidental" meeting at Mrs. Czermak's, he invented business engagements for all his evenings which would prevent his going there to see the baby this week. (And besides, he didn't want to face Monica, either.) And with the idea that Madge might be at the apartment with Lucinda when he came home, he stayed away every night until very late. . . . At least, he did this until Saturday; and that evening, having found nothing better to do than sit in the Crerar library, he revolted. After all, his apartment belonged to him. It was rather absurd for him to be kept out of it that way. He went home.

All the week he had been having, in his thoughts of Madge, the same experience which he had had so often since his life ran off the smooth track of custom and habit into the jungle of uncertainty in which he had to find out for himself what things were like—the experience of seeing facts change their appearance before his eyes. . . . In this changing and surprising world, his feeling about Madge had remained

fixed until now. He had been sorry to have hurt her—but glad nevertheless to have escaped from that marriage, because of what it would have meant. And now that certainty was being undermined. Since Madge had come to Chicago, he was remembering things about her—no, not things to make him regret that she had thrown him over, nothing to make him think himself still in love with her—nothing like that: yet sweet and brave and tender and funny little things, making of her a human girl and not a graven image of conventionality, an algebraic formula of bourgeois marriage. And in merely becoming in his imagination a person rather than a formula, she had upset him dreadfully—more than he was willing to admit to himself. For his campaign of life in Chicago was based implicitly upon an obscure but profound conviction that it represented a revolt against a system of respectability and hypocrisy. He wasn't a theorist, and he couldn't, or wouldn't have wished to, put it in words. But there it was. And that obscure theory gave him courage and faith. But if it was not against the rock-walled citadel of Respectability that he had dealt his clumsy and cruel blows, but against the naked and defenseless breast of a girl—a girl who happened to be in love with him—then some of the meaning went out of his whole brave adventure. He didn't want to face that possibility. He had tried to put aside these inconvenient and unsettling memories. But he wondered more and more what Madge was

really like. Perhaps he would never be sure until he saw and talked with her again.

Anyway, what was there to be afraid of? If she was at his apartment this evening, well and good. He would find out what that respectable young woman to whom he had once been engaged to be married was really like. . . .

But there was no one at the apartment.

He waited impatiently for his mother to come home.

She came at last, with Lucinda. They had been to the theater, they said. They did not mention Madge. But he knew quite well she had been with them. She must have gone on to the hotel alone to avoid meeting him. These elaborate evasions were rather silly, he thought. . . .

Lucinda, in her exasperating fashion, got started on an account of the musical comedy they had seen, and could not be stopped until she had described it all. It was the same one Norman had seen the week before with Charlie Beckett. He heard her wearily to the end—noting that she had picked up some slangy terms of speech from Doris—and when she started to go, he said: "I'll take you to your hotel."

She seemed surprised at this offer—and indeed it was a trifle unusual for Norman voluntarily to act as her escort. "Oh, you needn't bother," she said. "I can get a bus over on the Avenue."

"I'll take you," said Norman firmly.

### CHAPTER XIII: Conversation in a Taxi

**I**N the taxi he tried hard to think of something to talk about to his sister. He couldn't seem to think of anything at all to say.

They were going down Michigan Avenue. In another minute or two they would be at her hotel.

"Has Madge seen the baby?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes," said Lucinda. "She saw it the first thing."

"One look was enough, I suppose," said Norman bitterly.

"Oh, no," said Lucinda. "She goes with us every day."

"Oh," said Norman. "She does?"

"There's no reason," said Lucinda, "why she should bear a grudge against the baby."

"I suppose not," said Norman. "I'm the only one to blame. Of course, I couldn't exactly help it—the way I treated her. . . . I had hoped she might understand that—and forgive me a little."

Lucinda said nothing.

"Perhaps," said Norman, "I ought to see her."

"I don't know," said Lucinda doubtfully. "Tell me, Norman—have you been carrying on with that little Monica Case?"

"Why in the world should you think that?" asked Norman indignantly.

"Well, she wears your jade cuff-buttons, and turns all colors when your name is mentioned."

"And what of it?" Norman asked defiantly.

"Nothing. That's just the sort of girl you *would* get mixed up with," said Lucinda. "Your tastes always were rather vulgar, Norman."

"We were speaking of Madge, I believe," said Norman haughtily.

"Well, that's just it. I don't think it's very nice for Madge."

"I'm sorry," said Norman, "but I can't regulate my conduct to suit my ex-fiancée—or you either. Why did you bring Madge to Chicago?"

"I didn't bring her," said Lucinda. "But I knew she wanted to see the baby—and I thought it might help her to get over it all."

"You're lying, Lucinda," he said. "You know you want Madge and me to make up. And so does Mother."

"Well," said Lucinda, "I think we'd all rather you'd marry Madge than—that other girl."

"What other girl?"

"The one who—deserted the baby. You don't suppose I think you'd marry Monica Case, do you?" she added impersonally.

"Why should I marry at all?" he demanded.

"Oh, you'll have to marry *somebody*. Because of the baby, you know."

He smiled. "And why not the baby's mother, then?" he asked curiously.



"Oh, Norman—that *would* be the absolute limit! After the way she's treated you! You wouldn't be a—*a doormat!*" she said scornfully.

"Anyway," he said, "there's no reason why Madge and I shouldn't understand one another. I've no wish to hurt her feelings wantonly."

"Well, you can't see her to-night," said Lucinda. "She's gone to bed by now. She went on to the hotel so as not to see you."

"I think it's rather ridiculous," said Norman, "all this artificial avoidance. Suppose you bring her over to the apartment for breakfast. About eleven. Will you?"

"I'll ask her," said Lucinda.

"Do."

The taxi stopped at the hotel.

"I've told Lucinda to bring Madge around for Sunday breakfast," he said casually to his mother, who was still puttering about the apartment when he returned.

She frowned—in disapproval, Norman thought. But what she said was only: "I wonder if there are enough eggs."

She went into the kitchen, and came back. "Yes, there's plenty of everything," she said.

If she saw any dramatic crisis imminent in her son's life, she gave no sign of it. . . .



## CHAPTER XIV: A Farewell

WHEN his mother had gone to bed, Norman sat up smoking and thinking.

So Lucinda—and Vickley in general, no doubt—thought he ought not to marry Isabel!

Well, perhaps Vickley was right, at that.

Why should she be given another chance? Why should she be allowed to have the son she had deserted?

“No, by God—he’s mine!” thought Norman, rocked with an emotion of jealous hatred.

He went to bed. But presently he got up and turned on the light and brought back to bed with him the Apocrypha he had picked up. He turned to the story of Thecla. . . . This apocryphal girl saint was to him a queer parable. When he had first read its opening sentences he had been reminded of something Isabel had told him that day in the hospital—how she had broken her engagement, at eighteen, for the love of art. . . . St. Thecla here in the Apocrypha had broken hers for the love of God. . . . It was all different enough and yet as he read it had seemed to him that Isabel’s rebellious career was a queer, perverse, modern echo of that old tale. For “the gospel of Paul” one need only put “the gospel of Modern Art.”

He read it again, now, to allay his hatred of Isabel. For when he thought of Isabel, it was with love or hatred, and both were torments. He was safer in hating her, safer from the danger of more pain; but hating her hurt him. And in this parable he found something to make him sorry for her. . . .

The story he read told of how when Paul was preaching in Iconium a girl named Thecla, who was betrothed to a young man named Thamyris, sat in the window of her mother's house and listened to this new gospel; nor would she depart from the window. And her mother, when she could not be prevailed upon, sent for Thamyris, who came with exceeding pleasure, as hoping now to marry her. He said to her mother, "Where is my Thecla?"

Her mother replied: "Thamyris, I have a strange thing to tell you. For the space of three days my daughter has not moved from the window, not so much as to eat or drink, but is intent on hearing the artful and delusive discourses of a certain foreigner. Thamyris, this stranger causes trouble throughout the whole city of the Iconians, for the young men and girls listen to him and will not marry. And my daughter too, caught as in a spider's web at the window, is possessed by a new desire and a fearful passion. But go you and speak to her, for she is betrothed to you."

And Thamyris went to her, desiring her, and yet alarmed because of her strange ecstasy, and said: "Thecla, why do you sit thus? What strange pas-

sion holds you in its power? Turn to your Thamyris and be ashamed of yourself!" And her mother likewise: "Thecla, why do you look down and answer nothing, as if you had lost your wits?" And they mourned, Thamyris for his betrothed and her mother for her child, and Thecla paid no heed to them but listened only the while to the new gospel.

And Thamyris leapt up and went away . . . and brought officers with staves to arrest Paul, and had him led to the proconsul, saying: "This is the stranger who keeps girls from marrying." And Paul was taken to prison.

But Thecla that night took off her bracelets and gave them to the doorkeeper and went into the prison and sat at Paul's feet and listened to his words, and kissed his chains.

And they were brought before the governor, who asked: "Thecla, why will you not marry Thamyris, according to the law of the Iconians?" But she looked only upon Paul and answered not, and her own mother cried: "Burn the lawless one, burn her that will not be a bride, so that the women of Iconium may be made afraid to follow these new teachings!"

And she was brought naked to the stake, but God had compassion on her, and sent a rain to quench the fire. And she was set free, and went to Paul and said: "I will cut my hair, and follow you wherever you go."

But he said: "The time is ill-favored, and you are

comely. I fear a harder trial may come, which you will not be able to withstand."

But she cut her hair and went with him to Antioch. And there a magistrate named Alexander saw her and was enamored of her, and sent Paul presents. . . .

(Norman thought: "I became interested in pictures just to please Isabel." . . .)

But Paul said: "I know not this woman of whom you speak, neither does she belong to me."

And Alexander seized her in the street, but she rent his cloak and took the wreath from his head, and made him a laughing-stock before the whole town. . . .

"That's me," thought Norman.

He did not go on to read the rest of Thecla's triumphant career. He stopped there with poor Alexander, who had been made a laughing-stock before the whole town.

Nobody, he reflected, would ever write the inglorious story of Alexander. The sympathies of storytellers were always with the girl.

Not, to be sure, precisely with a girl like Isabel, though. They didn't understand a girl's being faithful to her art, in spite of a moonstruck moment in the woods—in spite of having a baby at her breast—in spite of confusion, complications, tormented and conflicting emotions. Legend, if she became famous, would simplify her story; and he alone would know what a troubled soul she had been. . . .

She was waiting now for her answer. She was trusting him to decide her life for her. Too tired, sick, discouraged, to know any more what she wanted, she was leaving it to him to say whether she should be an artist or a mother. He could take her in this moment of weakness. But he would never be content with what she had to give. . . .

No, he would trouble her no more with his human demands for love. He'd let her go on to her own destiny. . . .

It seemed to him that he had forgiven her. At least, he did not hate her now. And if he still, in a way loved her, yet he did not want her for his own. He had let her go. She was remote, now, in his imagination, above the reach of desire, shining from the abode where things that seem eternal find refuge. . . . And at the same time, it seemed to him that he had put aside his youth for ever.

## CHAPTER XV: The Inevitable

SUNDAY morning dawned for Norman—if it could be said to dawn at about ten o'clock—with a sense of fatality. At first he didn't know why. He lay in bed, hearing his mother stirring in the kitchen. Then he remembered. She was getting breakfast for Madge. Madge was coming. . . .

Suddenly in his imagination he saw the two of them left alone together. She would reproach him. Well, she had a right to. And he would feel sorry and ashamed. But he would defend himself—he would try to make her understand. It would be like one of their old-time quarrels. For they had quarreled—and made up. They had kissed and made up, always, and everything had seemed all right again. . . .

Well, perhaps it was inevitable. Everybody seemed to think he had to have a wife. Lucinda had said so. Dr. Zerneke had said so. His mother had as good as said so. A man with a baby was helpless. . . . And if Madge would marry him . . .

He turned, as if for the last time, to the thought of Monica. . . . Reckless little Monica—the rooming house—old Mr. Victor—the homely maternal airs of Mrs. Czermak—the Rabelaisian conversation of Mrs. Case. . . . He sighed. He knew now that those things weren't for him. . . .

He rose to face the day and what might come of it. . . . After all, Madge would be a damned sight nicer wife than he deserved. . . .

Breakfast was getting ready. He walked slowly back and forth.

The bell rang. He went to the door.

Lucinda was there, alone.

"Where's Madge?" he asked.

"She wouldn't come," said Lucinda. "She's very much upset. I left her at the hotel, packing to go back to Vickley."

"I'll go and get her," said Norman.

"Wait. She wrote this to you last night."

He took the letter and walked out.

Lucinda ran to the banister and called down to him. "The room is 314—you'd better go right up, Norman, if you want to see her!"

In the street he opened the envelope, stopped short on the corner, and read:

"Dear Norman Overbeck: I came to see your child, not to see you. Perhaps it was foolish of me to come; but I wanted to, and I'm not sorry I did. And I can tell you better in a letter how I feel about you, without seeing you.

"I don't blame you for what happened. I mean, about the baby. I love your baby. But you weren't fair to me. You never told me about the other girl. It wasn't fair to ask me to marry you when you were still in love with her. But I could forgive that, because maybe you didn't know and



thought you were over it. That isn't what hurts most.

"What hurts is that you should not have trusted me to understand about the baby. You never gave me a chance. You ran away before we could talk it over. You treated me as if I were a conventional little fool. That is what you thought of me. You never came back to explain. You didn't try to make me understand. You didn't let me have a chance to say whether I would take the baby or not. You just assumed that I was a certain sort of person. You didn't trust me, and that's what I shall never forgive you for.

"I'm not what you think. I'll tell you this. If it had been I that had had another sweetheart, and found I was going to have a baby when I was engaged to you—I'd have told you, I'd have trusted you, I'd have given you your chance.

"No, I'm not what you think. You never knew me. I hate Vickley as much as you do—more. It's you who are conventional at heart.

"You never gave me my chance.

"I would rather not see you. Some time I may feel differently, but it is too bitter a subject just now. I'm glad I've seen Norman Junior. I'm going back to Vickley in the morning, and I'm leaving with Lucinda some little things I've bought for him while I've been here.

"Good-by.

"MADGE FERRIS."

Norman stood there, with tears in his eyes. He hadn't known she was like that. . . . He had been an awful fool. He didn't understand girls at all. . . .

Well, if he got there before she left, it might still be all right. . . . It was plain that she still cared for him. . . .

"Taxi?"

"Yes!" He climbed in. "The Annex—quick!" In his imagination he could see Madge in the hotel room, packing. . . . He saw himself enter . . . yes, and quarrel, and kiss. Oh, there was no doubt that they would make up. . . . And no doubt, either, that that would be the best thing all around. . . .

Only one thing bothered him. Madge wasn't what he had thought, at all. She wasn't a doll. She was a real girl, with a heart. She could love, and suffer. She wouldn't mind being poor with him in Chicago. She would be a mother to his child. There was no reason why he shouldn't be glad to marry her. And in spite of what she wrote, she would be hoping in her heart that he would come before she packed up and left the hotel. Only one thing stood in the way—and that was something a loving and tender wife could surely banish—the ghost of that girl who was so unaccountably the mother of his child. . . . Oh, he would forget Isabel in time. . . .

But he might as well settle that now. He looked

out, and rapped on the glass. "Stop at that cigar store on the corner for a moment!"

He would send her a telegram, and have that off his mind. He knew her address in Michigan.

"Western Union, please. . . .

"I want to send a telegram. . . .

"To Miss Isabel Drury. . . . Yes. . . . Hawk Lake, Michigan. . . . Just a moment. . . ."

He had known what he was going to say. Something polite and final. But suddenly it was as if Isabel was at the other end of the wire, listening. . . . and the words went out of his head. . . .

"Just a moment," he repeated, while the world rocked dizzily about him. . . .

Couldn't he say the word that would free them both? Couldn't he let that vain dream go?

It seemed not. A new pattern of words was framing itself in his mind, forcing itself to his lips. . . .

Must he forever be a fool? Must he doom himself to endless unhappiness? It wouldn't work out. He knew it. He had renounced her. Why couldn't he take what life offered? Madge—and peace. . . . Madge—waiting now, ready to forgive him, cherish him, be patient with him. . . .

No. . . . But at least he could send a sane telegram.

He spoke into the telephone to the impatient operator: "I have it, now. Here's the message:

" 'Call me McCullough Advertising Agency when

you come Chicago this week preferably.' Signed, 'Norman.'

"That's all. How much is it?"

He dropped in the nickels and dimes. . . .

And Madge?—he couldn't help it, that was all. . . .

"I've changed my mind," he said to the taxi-driver, and handed him a dollar bill.

The taxi drove away, leaving him standing there on the corner.

Yes, no doubt it was a crazy thing to do. But he didn't care. He had to see this thing through with Isabel. . . .

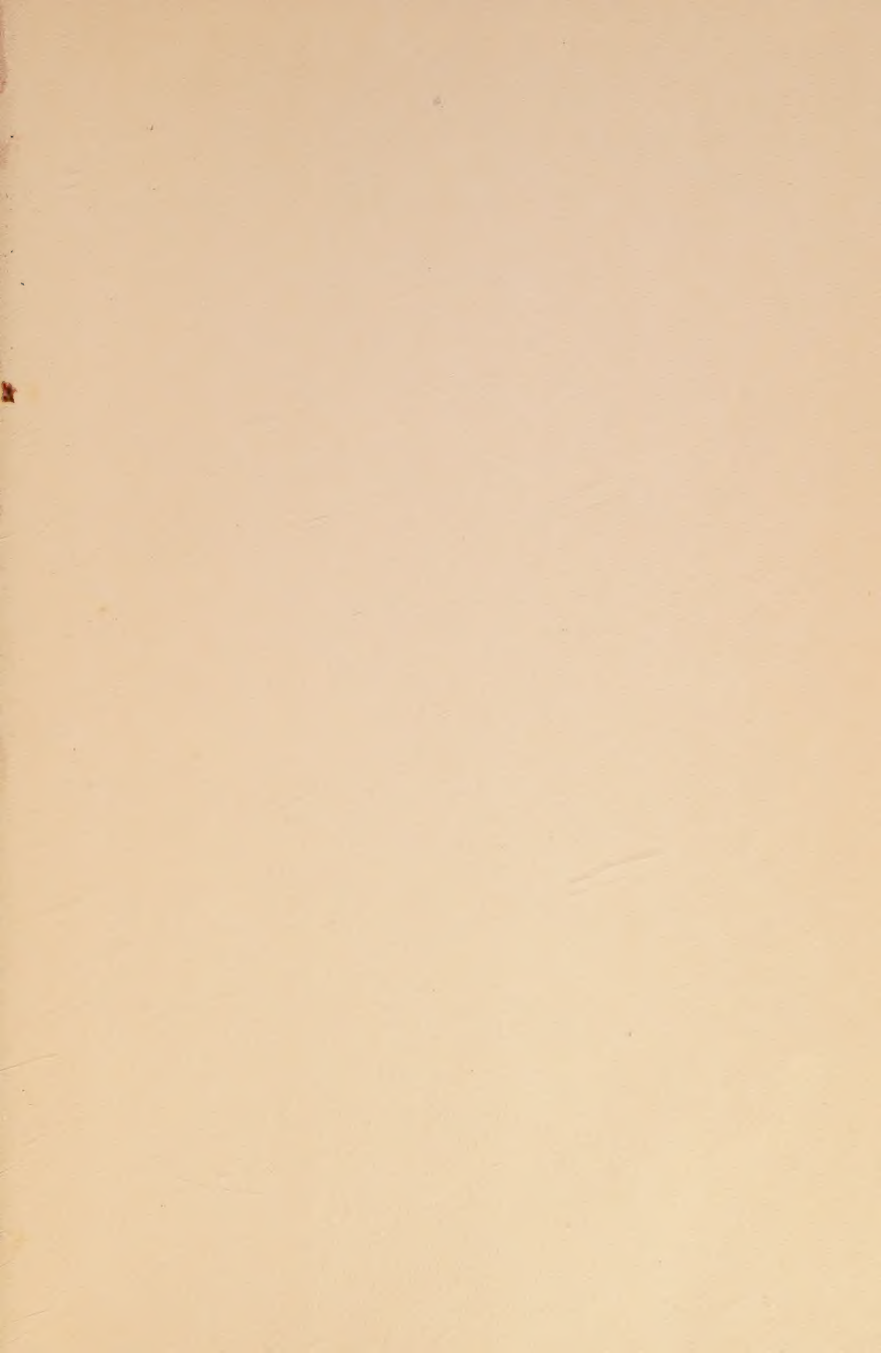
He began to walk slowly back toward the apartment.





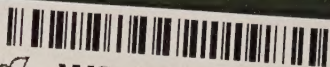












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